



# OBSERVER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY'S STERN COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

## Appeal Process Denied: Why the Case of Kim Evans Should Matter to You

**BY HANNAH DREYFUS** Dr. Kim Evans' appeal for tenure has been officially denied as of May 4, 2012. 360 signatures, 23 months (since the tenure process began—the appeal process has taken over 3 months), and countless expressed concerns later, Professor Kim Evans' appointment at Stern has been terminated. As a student body rightly concerned with the lack of transparency and absence of agreed-upon criteria for evaluative procedures at Stern College for Women, this is a matter that should be of concern to the entire undergraduate community, both to those who have and to those who have not taken courses with Professor Evans.

A quick timeline: Professor Evans began teaching at Stern in 2008. She left a well-established position at Redlands University in California, where she was poised for tenure in the upcoming semester. Because of her exceptional qualifications, she was invited to Stern on a 'short-clock' tenure track, meaning she would be considered for tenure after an unusually short period. She was given three semesters teaching and one pre-tenure sabbatical (served during the Spring semester of 2010) before being considered for tenure. It should be noted that Professor Evans left her well-respected and hard-earned position in California precisely to come to Stern College for

Women, as the unique nature of our student body and dual curriculum was, she thought, a very good fit for her intellectual and pedagogical interests.

As planned, Professor Evans filed for tenure in June of 2010. After waiting for over a year, an abnormally long waiting period, Professor Evans was informed in June of 2011 that her application had been denied. No reasons for her denial have ever been provided except for what she has been told by Dean Bacon: that, as Professor Evans reports, "concerns had been raised about the quality of my teaching," despite the fact that this "did not come from the students," whom the Dean said were "hugely and overwhelmingly unanimous in their support," and also that concerns had been raised about "the quality of my research," despite the fact that there was, as she said, "no question of concern about its quantity."

"If there were concerns about my teaching methods, I would have been more than happy to address the concerns. But the department never once brought any such concerns to my attention," said Dr. Evans in a recent interview with *The Observer*. "I was given no chance to address any such concerns, nor was I ever provided with an explanation of what these concerns were." A nearly perfect teaching record and a small army of dedicated students only deepens the



YU

question.

On the grounds of procedural errors, Dr. Evans formally requested an appeal within 72 hours of learning about the denial of her tenure application. The meeting with the Provost-appointed appeal committee took place on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011. "I

was told by the Provost that the whole appeal process would be completed within a month," said Professor Evans. Over three months later, Professor Evans received a letter from the Provost, dated May 4, 2012, three lines in length with an accompanying

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Dear President Joel and Provost Lowengrub:

At the previous Town Hall meeting, the question of Professor Kim Evans' recent denial of tenure was raised. This administrative decision has raised serious concerns among the student body. We trust that it is the administration's top priority to provide the women of Stern College with the most highly qualified, dedicated faculty members available. The following concerns have therefore arisen:

The decision not to tenure a professor of Professor Evans' caliber exacerbates a disconcerting divide between the men and women's colleges, and indeed between Yeshiva University and other institutions. At Yeshiva College, for example, the criteria for granting tenure are much more clearly delineated and there is a dedicated timeline for the tenure process. Moreover, there appears to be a different set of expectations for the standards for fulfilling faculty positions between the two colleges; at Stern College, candidates who have risen to the top of national searches have either not been hired or are being let go without reason or cause, and long-term contracts have been offered to people who did not participate in national searches. It is evident

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## The Toulouse Tragedy: Adequate Response?

**BY LINDSAY WESS** March 19, 2012—the Toulouse tragedy prematurely stole the lives of a rabbi and three young children. The attack, carried out by terrorist Mohamed Merh occurred outside of the Jewish school in Toulouse, France, Ozar Hatorah. A father taken away from his children and a mother left childless, the Jewish world was struck with sorrow and shock.

In New York City, high terror alerts caused the NYPD to take extra measures to ensure the safety of Yeshiva University's student body, especially during this vulnerable time. A statement from NYPD Director of Intelligence stated, "Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly has directed that... coverage of Jewish neighborhoods and institutions...continue out of concern

over the attack in Toulouse and concern over a copycat....Precautions are being taken because of New York's large Jewish community and because New York City remains on the top of the terrorist target list."

The question is, regarding both safety precautions and the grief factor, has Stern's response to this tragedy been adequate?

From a perspective of community support, efforts were unfortunately lacking. There may have been upset chatter through the hallways, yet no official memorial was held for the lives lost. Even though this wasn't our school, or even our country, the student body was nevertheless affected. International student Rebecca Assaraf, SCW '12, suffered a great family loss that day; Eva

Sandler, who lost her husband and two children, is Assaraf's first cousin.

Reliving that horrifying morning, Assaraf said, "I first heard about the shooting on the internet at 7:00 a.m. It was on a French newspaper website. Then I checked Facebook to see if everyone I know in France was okay. When the phone rang at my house, it was my uncle telling us that the victims were my cousin's husband and their two children. My family is shocked and in a lot of pain."

Concerning Stern's response to the tragedy, Assaraf said, "I was a little bit disappointed that Stern has done nothing. Not even a *tehillim* gathering to remember the victims. Just because it happened thousands of miles away doesn't mean we do not have to get involved. We are related to Yonathan,

Aryeh, Gavriel, and Miriam. Doesn't *Am Yisroel* make one? When one of us cries, all of us cry."

President of TAC, Leora Niderberg explained, "We clearly feel that the victims' memories should be commemorated and that the Jewish community, both within YU and Stern as well as within the greater Jewish community, is recognizing this loss. It just so happens we were caught at a time one week before Pesach break, a week when TAC itself was busy running a spotlight week on domestic violence and abuse within the Jewish community. It was just too crazy of a time to really demand people to either come out to a different event, or be involved in a *siyum*." Niderberg went on to say, "To be something worthwhile, students must

invest energy to make it into a truly honorable event. Without enough time, there simply wasn't enough space to put in a commemoration."

On the day of the shooting, an *ssud* was sent out informing the student body of the incident as well as what was being done to further ensure our safety. Sent from the Department of Safety and Security it stated, "Security concerns have increased as a result of the tragic shooting in Toulouse, France this morning. While there may have not been any specific threats to us or to any areas adjacent to our campuses, the Yeshiva University Security Department in coordination with the New York City Police Department has heightened its state of readiness with certain

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## The Yeshiva University OBSERVER

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## Dozens of Instructors Will Not Return in the Fall

**BY RENEE KESTENBAUM** Professors' contracts expiring this year will not be renewed, according to several of the instructors affected. Numerous departments have slots left vacant for next year, particularly for those of adjunct professors.

The YC political science department has already been reduced to a handful of courses with only one professor currently slated to teach (the rest have not yet been announced). Its speech department is now cut entirely. At SCW, next semester's political science and economics courses are almost entirely staffed by newcomers, with the exceptions of Dr. Joseph Luders and Dr. Dennis Hoover. The computer science department has been subsumed under the umbrella of Mathematical Sciences, and has only one professor remaining to teach all next semester's courses. Physical education classes, which in the past have included health, dance, yoga, and fencing, have been cut, though the athletics teams will still function.

The loss of so many adjunct professors seems to be the latest in a series of cuts slashing \$25 million from the budget. The university committed itself to completing the new budget by July 2012, so the time is coming up.

Some of the adjuncts affected have been teaching at YU for over a decade. In particular, Rabbi Dr. Bernhard Rosenberg, who has taught public speaking at YC for 23 years, took to Youtube after learning the department he helped create in 1966 would "no longer exist." In an impassioned plea for speech, foreign languages, drama, and the longevity of Yeshiva University, Rosenberg calls for solutions: for students to demand the cut courses be reinstated, for administrative pay cuts, to weed out ineffective tenured professors, for increased donations to the university.

The new belt-tightening budget is incredibly constricting, but of course some compromises are necessary if Yeshiva is to survive its financial crunch and come out ahead. Students showed a remarkable amount of understanding the necessity of putting the Schottenstein Cultural Center up for sale, as a decision that seemed unfortunate but best for all involved. Even the SCDS board members, though they will "greatly miss its presence in our lives at Stern" had to agree that selling the center is necessary.

The hope, and the goal, of "re-imagining" calls for creative solutions to real financial problems, without compromising the education which is, as it ought to be, our primary reason for attending this university. Many out-of-the-box (and facetious) suggestions have been offered.

Members of the women's athletic teams have been campaigning for shared use of the gym on Wilf Campus, rather than spending what they claim is \$60,000 per year to rent the gym at Baruch.

After learning that SCDS was losing their stage, Reuven Russell, Professor of Speech and Drama and Artistic Director of SCDS suggested introducing interactive theater. "I used to do a great, funny Jewish show at Levana's Restaurant," said Russell, "called a Match Made in Manhattan, where it was interactive and in the restaurant itself, which was a great and creative space to be. Maybe we'll choose to produce a show that can use some kind of unique space at Stern College."

The president recognizes the impracticality of some suggestions. "We're not saying every faculty member will get a Segway," said President Joel in an interview with the Observer in October, "and say that from 9-10 they are supposed to be on Beren and hopefully they'll be able to take their Segway up to Wilf." But seriously, folks.

You can't go too far in scrimping. The problem with making too many cuts is that if you lower the quality of the very thing you are trying to save, then what is it you are protecting? You can't destroy the undergraduate experience in order to save it.

Something which *could* be more effective on a smaller, reimagined scale is the S. Daniel Abraham Honors Program at SCW. A suggestion: the honors classes I have taken have been the best of my college career, and researching for my Senior Project is thrilling, but the second component of the program, its cultural and leadership events, could be far improved by teaming up with events and the excellent leadership programs implemented at SCW within the last few years. Instead of attending one or two speakers on leadership, what if honors students were required to take part in their choice of

several semester-long leadership programs, such as QUEST or the Women's Leadership Fellowship, or run a club? Students would have gained practicable leadership skills in an immersive environment, using the existing resources that the college already has in place.

The vision from this point forward looks shaky. Dozens of adjuncts are leaving. An entire department has been cut, and many others are hugely downsized. In November, the faculty was informed they would not receive pay raises for a minimum of two years.

We might soon see harsh effects: fewer offered courses, fewer options, larger class sizes, full professors carrying course-loads as heavy as our own. Students feel alienated from the university if they feel their needs are being ignored, and, if they don't feel connected, will be less likely to donate after they graduate. Prospective students might be turned off if current students present them with the image that Yeshiva is shrinking. It's not a pretty picture.

A breadth of classes *must* be maintained, to keep students excited and interested in classes, whether they're studying for their first year or their fifth. A breadth of disciplines is also critical to building the unique community that is SCW, where a women's studies minor, a pre-law student, and an audiology major can cross paths not just once but again, and again, and again, become friends, and learn from one another's thoughts and lives.

As for the next tough decision, and the next, and the next, be careful while pruning not to sever a branch you can't regrow.

## Hakarat Hatov

In this final issue of The Observer 2011-2012 I want to publicly extend a tremendous Yashar Koach to the entire Observer staff on their hard work that made this newspaper and this year successful, and specifically...

To Sophie, Rachel, and Marganit - remember the early days, scoops and breaking news every night? From then till now, you've been my strongest sounding board and my go-to writers. Thank you for giving me the chance to work with you.

To Hannah - working with you has been exciting! Thank you for sharing your enthusiasm and never being afraid to just ask, because you never know what can happen.

To Tali - approval matrix. 'Nuff said?

To Aimee - no matter which section you worked for, you were dedicated, on time (if not early), and professional, and I appreciate that, thank you!

To Atara - number one roommate/editor combo. Thank you for your support.

To Talia and Elana - for some truly unique Opinions, thank you.

To Shulamit and Naamah - I have no words. You two worked fantastically to build a strong Science & Health section, on time and responsible. You worked hard and should be proud.

To Meira - I'm impressed by your dedication, to the paper and to strengthening the YU athletic spirit.

To Ann - My. Right. Hand. Your dedication, your company throughout the long nights (and mornings), and your advice were indispensable.

To Julia - always on top of your photographers, always top-notch. Thanks!

To Nomi - thank you for being so dedicated.

To Shaindee and Sarit - thank you for stepping in to help figure things out, and for your hard work.

Good luck to Rachel Benaim, Editor in Chief of The Observer 2012-2013!

## Deans' Forum Puts Deans and Students in Touch

**BY RENEE KESTENBAUM** On April 25, the Student Academic Affairs Committee (SAAC) organized a Deans' Forum, styled after the Town Hall meetings, only "with the deans who can actually implement and push forward the issues that students bring up," said Valarie Dahan, the president of SAAC. SAAC serves as a liaison, bringing students' academic concerns to the attention of the administration and helping to effect positive changes.

Around 25 students attended the forum, which was held during Club Hour. Dean Bacon, Dean Orlian, Dean Pava and Dean Strauss from Syms, Diana Benmergui from the Office of the Registrar, Miriam Schechter from Academic Advisement, and Marc Goldman from the Career Development Center were present.

"This is a place committed to maximizing the potential of every student," said Dean Bacon in her introductory remarks, "but making that happen is a two-way street." Students who approach the deans with a request intended to challenge themselves academically will find the deans willing to respond, said the dean. Dean Bacon encouraged students to "take the risk of reaching out."

Students asked questions about academic policies and rules such as double dipping, why SCW does not accept credit from community college credits taken in high school, and whether exit exams, which students on material initially learned years earlier, are realistic (the policy is that one course is allowed to count for both major and general requirements,

but some science and math majors work differently; "credits are cheap but education is empowering," said Dean Bacon, expressing concern over the quality of a high school course; Dean Orlian responded that, in many disciplines, a student does not forget the knowledge gained in her earlier classes but, rather, builds upon it. Dean Bacon added that as SCW is a small school, the exit exams work as a standardized test to compare our smaller program with those of other universities).

Some students came with ideas of their own. Faygel Beren, SCW '12, asked if a Friday class could be offered where researchers could teach courses on research techniques. Chana Brauser, SCW '14 wondered if the Middle Eastern Studies minor would return, and if some of the history

courses she wanted to take could be fulfilled at another university.

After questions were asked and answered, students lined up to speak with their deans one-on-one, a sure sign of success in an event intended to facilitate communication between student and administrator.

The SAAC is "relatively new and underused," said Dahan, but, in its powers of facilitating communication, has already begun to make waves. "As of now we have successfully convinced the administration to hire a new ESL tutor for the writing center," she said, "work with computer science majors to assure all of their needs are met, and, most recently, allow Stern students to take up to two Syms courses that will count toward the general elective requirements."

# Appeal Process Denied: Why the Case of Kim Evans Should Matter to You

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one-page long letter, termed a 'report,' from the ad hoc tenure appeals committee. The letter informed Dr. Evans of the final decision to deny the appeal, and the termination of her appointment at Stern. The report cited Dr. Evans' own stated grounds for her appeal and then rejected the grounds. No account was provided of the reasons for the denial, and no evaluation of the tenure procedure was offered.

It is important to note that nothing is guaranteed in the field of academia. However, one must question why a Professor, hired and placed on an accelerated tenure track specifically for her exceptional qualifications, was then denied tenure on those very same grounds.

A brief look at Dr. Evans' work: Dr. Evans boasts an impressive array of publications and professional recognitions. Among her numerous accomplishments, (which can be viewed in full on her CV posted at yu.edu) Dr. Evans has published one critical book (*Whale!* University of Minnesota Press, 2003) and has one forthcoming from the same A-level academic press and 9 published peer-reviewed articles—competitive credentials for even top-tier universities. Dr. Evans has, in addition, been the recipient of several teaching awards and highly competitive scholarly grants, including a Fulbright Research Fellowship. Aside from her academic accomplishments, Professor Evans totes a nearly perfect student record. Just this year (and for the second year in a row) she was among the top three faculty members nominated by students to receive the prestigious Lillian F. and William L. Silber Award, a yearly recognition of one outstanding faculty member.

Stern students have consistently spoken out in support of Dr. Evans. At the most recent Town Hall Meeting, four student leaders presented President Joel with a petition signed by 360 students over the course of two days. They additionally presented President Joel with a letter detailing student concerns, printed at right.

Providing some words of assurance, Dean Karen Bacon commented, "The strong support Dr. Evans has from the students she has taught was never in question. Students can feel assured that this information was clearly included in her tenure review dossier and formed part of the formal documents that were considered."

But, no matter how much student support Dr. Evans received, student support is not what ultimately gains a professor tenure. "At the end of the day, what the student body has to realize is that this case is not just about the loss of one Professor," said Jina Davidovich, editor for *The Commentator* and active student leader. "It is a case about transparency within our institution when it comes to administrative decisions that directly affect the student body. This case is

about the absence of an objective set of standards in order to prevent the tenure process from becoming arbitrary and secretive."

Tenure is achieved by having a record of demonstrated excellence as a teacher and scholar, as well as an established record of support for the department, college and University. In the case of Dr. Evans, the 'concerns' raised about her teaching were not raised by the students, nor were they

## A LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND DUE PROCESS WILL LOSE OUR COLLEGE THE RESPECT AND PATRONAGE OF SERIOUS SCHOLARS AND, ULTIMATELY, SERIOUS STUDENTS.

ever discussed, with Dr. Evans in the two years prior to her going up for tenure.

While additional 'concerns' were raised about the 'quality' of her research (but not its quantity), it is important to note that quality of scholarship is deemed, not by the Dean of the College or even by members of the department, but by the quality of the outlets in which a Professor publishes his/her research, and other concrete examples of peer esteem. Dr. Evans has published her research in outlets of unquestionable quality (for example University of Minnesota Press or rigorously peer-reviewed journals such as the journal *Philosophy*, published by Cambridge University Press). Questioning the 'quality' of her research, therefore, only highlights the way in which evaluative measures at Stern are nothing like those at comparably ranked universities.

*Evaluative procedures matter.* In the case of Dr. Evans, there was no record of "concern" before going up for tenure. If concerns arose in the course of the process, the candidate should be allowed to address these concerns. The "concerns" about Dr. Evans surfaced at the end of a long process and remain shrouded in mystery. Given no written or verbal evaluation, prior to application or after the denial, the evaluative measures in this case prove inadequate and ambiguous.

If and when transparent tenure and promotion procedures are established, Stern will move one step closer to instituting rational, evidence-based evaluation measures. The college will be able to continue hiring promising young scholars, without leaving them to the same ambiguous "evaluative procedures" that have contributed to Yeshiva's earning, since 1981, its ignominious place on the AAUP (American Association of University Professors) list of censured institutions.

The AAUP, according to their official website, is an organization dedicated to "defin[ing] fundamental

professional values and standards for higher education." Their Censure List is a list of Universities who "are not observing the generally recognized principles of academic freedom and tenure approved by this Association ... and more than two hundred other professional and educational organizations which have endorsed the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure." The other universities listed are far below the caliber of Yeshiva, a Top 50 Institution as ranked this year by US News. The AAUP Censure List and more information about the AAUP are easily accessible online.

Yeshiva University was placed on this list three decades ago for illegitimate tenure practices. YU terminated the tenured appointments of three professors, Charles Patt, Shelly Koenigsberg, and Dorothy Sievers, an unjust action when considered in accordance with the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure and the Association's Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure. Full documentation is easily accessible online. A university is removed from the AAUP Censure List when their unjust practices are satisfactorily reformed. Yeshiva University is still on this list.

Furthermore, while most top-tier Universities have a handbook clearly outlining the tenure track process, at this time, the only handbook existing at Yeshiva University is the 1993 Faculty Handbook for Manhattan Campuses, a document lacking in necessary details regarding requirements for tenure. A handbook that *does* carefully detail requirements for tenure, according to the Harvard Tenure Track Handbook, understands "the importance of making this system transparent and easy to navigate." The Handbook provides a clear set of standards and expectations for a professor to receive tenure, as well as a timeline available for guidance. A Tenure Track Handbook prevents the tenure process from being opaque or arbitrary. Although Yeshiva University claims

## NO MATTER HOW MUCH STUDENT SUPPORT DR. EVANS RECEIVES, STUDENT SUPPORT IS NOT WHAT ULTIMATELY GAINS A PROFESSOR TENURE.

to be in the Process of drafting such a handbook, at this point in time, no such handbook exists,

leaving no objective or referable standards for who will receive tenure and on what grounds.

As students, the extent to which Stern's practices and evaluative procedures have the potential to undermine its standing as a serious institution should be a matter of great concern. A lack of transparency and due process will lose our university the respect and patronage of serious scholars and, ultimately, serious students. It is time that these unethical practices are reexamined. No one is advantaged by a continued silence.



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## A Petition From the Student Body

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that national searches raise standards, and also that the administration is not properly supporting those faculty, like Professor Evans, who not only secured their positions by appropriate means but who are widely published, active scholars with a demonstrated record of teaching excellence. Without clearly delineated criteria for granting tenure, without a formal and transparent procedure for processing tenure applications, and without clear evidence that decisions are being made regarding the best interests of Stern students, the hiring and firing process becomes arbitrary and personal. Stern students deserve the chance to be taught by the best professors the country has to offer.

Students seek dedicated long-term teachers, whom students can depend on for continued academic support (in the form of letters of recommendation, advice, etc) critical for their own career advancement. Professor Evans has been exactly that -- at once a mentor and role model -- and her dismissal from the department is causing Stern students to lose one of the most exciting researchers and well-loved teachers in the department. Most Stern College students are only undergraduates for three years. During this precious but brief time, it is critical that students have access to dedicated Professors of high quality who will help them with their career options long after their undergraduate years have passed.

Professor Evans has been especially loved, cherished, and respected by students in the S. Daniel Abraham Honors program. Students of every major recall her Freshman Composition Class as one of the most enriching, broadening classes ever taken. For an institution that prides itself on the opportunities it provides to its Honors Students, removing a professor of Professor Evans' caliber would be denying the top students at the University the level of education to which they are entitled. These are students who could have easily chosen to go elsewhere, but chose Stern because of the confidence they had in the quality of education they would receive at Stern and at the university. For the sake of future Honors students as well as current Honors students, maintaining this confidence should be an utmost priority.

Although a recent appeal took place to reassess the procedural errors of the process, the three-person committee is strictly advisory. The decision to keep Professor Evans lies in your hands alone.

We, the below signed, speak out now at this critical juncture because we have confidence that the administration will act with the students' best academic interests in mind. Granting Professor Evans tenure after the recent appeal is a chance to demonstrate the administration's commitment to excellence in undergraduate education. We, the student body, need to sense that Stern College is providing us with the best education possible.

The decision lies in your hands. Our concerns have been given voice. We trust you are our faithful representatives.

With the Utmost Respect,  
The Stern Student Body

**The Observer wishes you a wonderful summer!**

## News You May Have Missed

**Charlie Harary to Teach at Syms Next Semester** – A popular lecturer for Aish Hatorah, the Orthodox Union, and NCSY, Charlie Harary will teach a course in entrepreneurship called “Principles of Success.” Said SSB Dean Moses Pava, the course will consider ideas about success in all aspects of life.

**Looking Forward to Next Year, From the Student Life Committee** – You’ll have many fewer studs next year. SCW and YC will begin to use the 25Live event scheduling service, putting all events in one central place. You pick the events you are interested in, and can synch them with your own personal calendar. Time changes and details can all be added directly to the calendar, cutting down on the number of event-related studs you’ll receive.

The off-campus dining program will continue next year.

Le Bistro’s menu is being reconsidered for next year. Possible new options include more healthy food, organic food, and fresh food options, as well as grocery items currently available only in the C-stores.

Next year, the university Human Resources department will have office hours on Beren Campus every other Friday, giving student employees face-time to discuss issues with their campus jobs, including payroll problems.

Over the summer, wireless internet will be enabled in the student lounge outside the Reference Library. More classrooms in 245 Lexington will become wireless as the budget permits.

All Hebrew finals in the Fall semester have been moved from Friday to Sunday, so students can study for this Judaic Studies exam

over Shabbat.

### **Rosa’s Pizza No Longer Kosher**

– Rosa’s Pizza is changing ownership, and the new owner chose not to keep the restaurant kosher. Effective May 15, 2012, Rosa’s is no longer certified by the OU.

### **Student Council Elections Results**

#### **SCWSC**

President: Adina Minkowitz  
Vice President: Shimra Barnett  
Recording Secretary: Amanda Esraeilian  
Corresponding Secretary: Adena Kleiner  
Treasurer: Rebecca Peyser

#### **TAC**

President: Margot Reinstein  
Vice President: Yehudit Goldberg  
Vice President: Rivka Herzfeld

Secretary: Atara Clark  
Treasurer: Rachel Ramras

### **New Administration for Syms School of Business**

– The leadership team that was appointed to SSB last summer was officially promoted in March. Dr. Moses Pava was appointed as Dean of SSB, and Professor Michael Strauss and Dr. Avi Giloni were appointed as Associate Deans. The deans’ new positions were announced in an email from Provost Morton Lowengrub on March 13.

### **Dean of Students Joined The Jed Foundation**

– Dr. Victor Schwartz, former University Dean of Students, departed Yeshiva in March to become medical director at The Jed Foundation, which works to reduce the prevalence of emotional distress and suicide among college students. Dr. Schwartz has spoken and published widely on mental health and suicide

in college students. “This is an area I have really spent the bulk of my professional career working on,” said Schwartz. “This opportunity was too good to pass up.”

At the Wilf Campus Town Hall Meeting on March 15, President Richard Joel acknowledged Schwartz’s seven years of service to the university’s students, “keeping all of you well and healthy and able to deal with the great opportunities and great challenges of being your age in a difficult time. He has given us an incredible wealth in our Counseling Center and Disabilities Center, and has helped to build community. Dean Schwartz served as friend and mentor to many of us, was of great help to me and extended great friendship.”

## Housing Modifications on Beren Campus

## The Toulouse Tragedy: Adequate Response?

**BY RACHEL DELIA BENAIM** Beren campus housing has announced two housing modifications and additions over the past few months: housing for part time students, and extended summer housing.

The part time student housing initiative is in its trial run this semester. “We have five students in it right now,” revealed Shana Glasser, the Associate Director of 35th Street Residence Hall. “It is going successfully and we have decided to extend it to next semester as well.”

Last fall, the Office of the Dean, in conjunction with the Office of University Housing and Residence Life, created a pilot program offering part-time students in their last semester the option of living on campus for the Spring 2012 semester.

This program caters to students who wish to pursue joint programs—be it nursing, engineering... you name it. Essentially, students who are already accepted in graduate school but still have classes to complete for their major can stay in undergraduate housing even though they’re not considered full-time students, taking fewer than the required 12 credits at SCW.

As a whole, the program’s parameters are rather simple. All per-credit tuition, fees and housing charges apply. Students must adhere to all dorm regulations, and participate in the meal plan as well.

To be eligible for part time housing, a student be graduating in May 2012, currently registered for at least 3 credits of formal on-campus courses (which are required to complete an undergraduate degree), and all credits and grades for said courses must appear on the students official transcript.

On a similar note, the campus housing instituted a new, expanded summer housing initiative piloting this summer. Summer housing is available to all Yeshiva undergraduate students who will be involved in academic and professionally-related pursuits over the

summer.

In previous years, “the program used to have strict guidelines, but now it’s open to any undergrad student,” said Glasser. “It used to be for [students getting summer] credit, but now it’s for anyone who staying in NY for the summer... We anticipate this pilot program to be extremely beneficial to students—all YU undergrad now have somewhere to stay for the summer,” she said.

This summer’s housing options will be different than in other years because of the program’s timespan. There will be two sessions of summer housing: May 29 – July 3, and July 3 – August 7. What this means in plain language is that now housing is opened until August 7 as opposed to closing after the first summer school semester.

The reason for this, Glasser said, is that “in housing, we’re all about the students. That’s just how we function – we want to make the students experiences here as pleasant as possible.”

As in previous years, all students who register for summer housing will be placed in the Schottenstein Residence Hall, 119 East 29<sup>th</sup> Street. For students interested in Summer Housing on the Beren Campus, applications are currently available in Rachel Kraut’s Office in the front of Brookdale between 9 am and 5 pm.

The one down side to the new housing initiative, Glasser admitted, is the monetary cost. “Now there’s regular housing fees and such to cover the cost to run an entire building for three months,” she said. Thus, the cost for Summer Housing is \$750 for each session and \$1,400 for students who wish to live on campus for both summer semesters. Glasser explained the cost decision saying “we’re just trying to make it make sense – change is never easy but we’re thinking more people will stay and benefit.”

*continued from page 1*

modifications to its staffing and procedures in order to provide our community with a safe environment.” NYPD is in contact with Yeshiva on a daily basis, giving updates about the strengthening of security around Stern premises, or just to inform the security general of their daily precautions.

However, whether a perfunctory online notification was a sufficient response to such a great tragedy remains in question. What was a student to think after hearing about the attack and then seeing NYPD in front of Stern school buildings and Brookdale without further explanation?

Sara Yitzhaky, SCW’13, admitted, “Although necessary, the amount of security is actually what made me nervous. It made it so much more real.”

Acknowledging the increased Stern security, Dean Karen Bacon added “I have confidence in our security team that they are very knowledgeable and very connected, and they are always on the alert.” However, student’s responsibility to keep themselves safe is in no way mitigated. Continued Bacon, “We always have to be on alert, not only for ourselves but for the people around us. We are all responsible for one another, and we have to look out for each other.”

Regardless, living in fear is neither desirable nor helpful. Bacon explained, “I think we always have to be on the alert. But we can’t become paranoid, because, in the end, that is what will paralyze us.” With that in mind, Bacon wants the Stern body to feel confident in the continued and dedicated vigilance of the security. Highlighting the exceptional security here at Stern College, Bacon noted, “After 9/11, many organizations had to step up their security. Here at Stern,



Julia Siegel

The Observer would like to thank Nezmo and his owner Leah for their assistance in the photo shoot.

however, we didn’t have to do much differently because we were always a place that is very alert when it comes to security.”

Notwithstanding Stern’s response to the tragedy, both in terms of heightened security and the unfortunate lack of a memorial service, Assaraf takes a lesson from the tragedy. She explains, “This didn’t happen without a reason. Perhaps we are being sent a wake-up call. As Jews, we are taught that there are no coincidences, and so we have to reflect upon what has happened. We should try to better ourselves, and I believe that commemorating the victims here at Stern in some way to show the unity of the Jewish people is a good start.”

## Reclaiming Our Identity as an All Women's College

**BY YAELE LASSON** The YU Maccabeats were performing uptown in the Lamport Auditorium while, at the Schottenstein Cultural Center, in Midtown Stern women were staging their final performance of "So You Think Stern Can Dance." The dilemma: in which audience will I choose to sit?

The dilemma reflects upon a larger tension within the Stern student body. On the one hand, we are proud to attend Yeshiva University, the "flagship institution of Modern Orthodoxy" (so often touted); yet, as students of a uniquely all-women's college, we feel compelled to focus on our own Midtown campus. Split into two campuses, it can be envisioned like a family tree: our parent - Yeshiva University, and the two offspring branches, Yeshiva College the brother school and Stern College for Women the sister school. However, oftentimes a tinge of "sibling rivalry" often surfaces when the inequalities between the two campuses become uncomfortably apparent. YC has a bigger Beit Medrash. A pool. A gym. A Superbowl party. More faculty. More courses. More majors. A significant

part of most Town Hall meetings at Stern are spent voicing requests for equal facilities and services.

Sternies often forget: we are Stern College for Women. But, do we see this as an automatic advantage, or do we view it as a disadvantage, the explanation for our seeming inequality? Do Stern students feel any pride in being an all women's college? Do we utilize the power, potential, and possibilities uniquely offered by an all women's institution?

Chani Herzig, SCW '14, who shaped a major in Women's Health, a combination of pre-nursing and women's studies courses, asserts, "I feel tremendous Stern pride. In an all women's environment, we are allowed to thrive and explore what it means to be a Jewish woman. The Women's Studies society really provides the forum to explore these ideas."

The Women's Studies society and the academic minor celebrate what is specifically unique about the Stern community. The minor was instituted in 2003 and focuses on relevant issues to college women in multiple fields of study. The coursework is interdisciplinary, requiring a range

of classes studying women's roles in literature, health, politics, psychology and more. By participating in the minor, students learn how gender roles impact social norms and everyday expectations of women.

Professor Dr. Nora Nachumi, faculty advisor of the Women Studies minor, spoke about the minor and Women Studies's society in a recent interview with The Observer. "The students involved are especially committed," said Nachumi. "These women have chosen to study about women, with women, reflecting one of the core values of this institution. The women who get involved demonstrate concern about their education as Modern Orthodox Jews and more specifically, as women. It's not an identity that should be taken for granted."

Exploring this identity is a vital part of a Stern student's extracurricular activities. The Women's Leadership Fellowship is a prime example. Hearing from active female leaders within the Jewish community making a difference in a greater capacity, students learn first hand how and what it means to be a forerunner in a community.

# FEATURES

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"An aspect that Stern should be proud of is fostering leaders who have combined Judaism and their secular education to become successful in both spheres," acknowledges Sonia Felder, SCW '14, a fellow in the Women's Jewish Leadership program. "The fellowship has taught me that you can have career goals and aspirations, and yet be able to balance those and Judaism at the same time. They haven't shied away from their role as a leader based on gender."

Women's studies minors have demonstrated significant success within their professional fields. Tirtza Spiegel, SCW '11, a first year student at Albert Einstein School of Medicine is hoping to pursue a career in Women's Health. When a student

in Stern, she majored in Biology and minored in Women's Studies, feeling the combination of the two disciplines "heightened my awareness of the disparities of women's healthcare, both biologically and medically," said Spiegel. "I realized that there were not enough advocates for specifically Women's Health within the Stern community. The match of my major and minor allowed me to fuse my passions into my future career, as well as bringing awareness of these issues to the Stern community."

"The point of the Woman Studies Minor is not to foster stereotypes about feminism, but rather to produce dynamic community members and professionals armed with knowledge

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## My Reading Renaissance: Goodbye Internet, Hello Austen

**BY CHANA BRAUSER** I can only remember one time I actually walked straight into a wall. In my defense, the windows in the Gap store were incredibly transparent, and who could blame me for thinking that they weren't actually there? This memory brings to mind the scene in the second Harry Potter book where Ron and Harry run headfirst into the wall at the train station, hoping to emerge as per usual into a bustling crowd on Platform Nine and Three-Quarters, but instead find themselves splayed out on the floor amidst masses of Muggles, trunks toppled and owl squawking conspicuously.

The moral of the story, though, is not to suggest that my slightly traumatic experience in a suburban mall measures up to the far cooler scenario of missing a train to Hogwarts as per the devious design of a dogged house-elf committed to preventing a meeting of the Dark Lord with the one person ultimately destined to bring about his downfall. No, to be quite frank: I simply missed the telltale sheen of a clear window and ended up with a slightly bruised forehead. Rather, the reason I included this anecdote was to attest to the singularity of the event. My actually walking into a wall as a child was a rarity of the sort that did not warrant my being asked, time and time again by many a well-meaning family member or friend whether I thought I ought to be wary of bumping into something whilst walking around with my head constantly in a book.

On second thought, what I really wanted most to emphasize with that anecdote (in the most roundabout way possible) was my childhood status as a bookworm extraordinaire. My childhood was literally spent with my nose in a book. I would read while eating, brushing my teeth, sitting in the car, and sometimes during recess, if it happened to be a particularly absorbing book (even fourth graders get tired of monkey bars). And yes, I would often read as I walked from room to room, prompting rounds of tiresome teasing about my walking into a wall. Before nodding off to sleep each night, I'd

deliberate over which of the seven books stacked by my bedside - all of which I was in the middle of - to read that night. A day was not complete if I hadn't read at least a bit of a book, though preferably a significant chunk.

Cue high school. Suddenly, my spare time became study time and the novels by my bedside were replaced by study guides for various AP courses. Any bit of a break I could catch certainly wasn't long enough to really get into a book, so instead of reading, I found myself on Instant Messenger (those were the days!) or randomly browsing online. To be fair, I didn't quite give up reading entirely. It was still a huge part of my life, though it could no longer be as significant as it once was. It only got worse, though; by twelfth grade, I was able to fall asleep without even reading a page, a feat that would have been inconceivable to a younger me.

The Internet, with its capacity for instant gratification, lacked the depth of a novel, the intimate knowledge of a cast of colorful characters, the suspenseful plot, the thrilling climax. But a few minutes on the Internet certainly provided a quick rush of fulfillment: I could read a blog post in five minutes, check my email in three minutes, get a sense of international news in 30 seconds.

After a brief hiatus from both the Internet and my books while I was in seminary in Israel, I entered the wonderful world of Stern College for Women, where evenings were relegated to reading endless chapters in various textbooks. With my free time once again so limited, I wasn't about to begin reading a book when I could use those precious few minutes to catch up on some blogs or initiate a neat little row of g-chats. Although I sometimes kept a book on my windowsill just in case, the minutes before sleep were usually illuminated by my computer screen.

Is it just me? I doubt it. Based on cursory glances at the computer screens of various fellow students, I'm not alone. The Internet has become a surefire way for a weary college

student, bogged down with hours of homework, to take a quick break, to make the most of a few spare moments. It's a universe where a blank Word document - demanding to be filled with pages of a political science paper or charts from a Chem lab - is relegated to a shy, unnoticed tab in the corner of a far more engaging screen. It would seem that the Internet is slightly more addicting than it is fascinating. Let's face it - at some point, even pictures of cute cats with badly misspelled captions lose their allure, and the experience becomes more about the instant gratification of click-click-click than any meaningful adventure.

Sometime in the middle of finals, I suddenly became incredibly bored by my normal Internet activity; the blogs I frequented no longer interested me and Google News could only be refreshed so many times (surprisingly, the state of world affairs does not tend to dramatically shift in twelve seconds). Though my friends might be witty nonverbal conversationalists, there was nothing so captivating about my g-chats that I was in danger of burrowing my nose into a laptop and walking into a wall.

No, I was craving something different, something beyond the instant flashing of changing websites and blinking boxes. And so it was that when I arrived home after the last of my finals, I picked up the dusty copy of *Pride and Prejudice* that had been languishing on my bookshelf for years. Somehow, I could never seem to get past page 21, but I declared that this time would be different, confident that the time had come for me to finally take on this classic.

Luckily, I made it past page 20 - wouldn't you know, page 21 turned out to be a real humdinger - and before long I couldn't put the book down. I'd read while stirring soup on the stove, while making my bed, and yes, even while walking around the house. I'd curl up in bed to read while my laptop sat forlorn and forgotten in a dark corner of the room. Returning to the glory days of bookworm-hood was exhilarating - I'd forgotten the thrill of

suspense, the anticipation of climax, the exciting progression from chapter to chapter. When I couldn't stop ruminating about the contents of Mr. Darcy's latest letter to Elizabeth, three minutes was no longer something to sneeze at. Instead of thinking I only had enough time to glance through my email, I realized that I could use the time to read at least a few pages and satisfy just a bit of my curiosity. Almost as soon as I finished *Pride and Prejudice*, I dove right into *Sense and Sensibility*. I felt that there was something different about reading Austen, with its 19th century English and florid dialogue, that required me to fully focus on the reading experience in a way some slightly easier reads don't quite necessitate. I was wholly absorbed in reading and exulting in the reclamation of my once dormant passion.

A quick Youtube search reveals several clips of people actually attempting to run through Platform Nine and Three-Quarters. While I'm as big a Harry Potter fan as anyone - I may or may not have dressed up Hermione Granger three Purims in a row - I probably wouldn't go so far as to run headfirst through a brick wall. But if someone happens to walk into a wall accidentally because they're so absorbed in, say, a Harry Potter book, I'd heartily commend them. Rediscovering reading in a world where the Internet reigns supreme is no easy feat, but it's not exactly as difficult as mastering the Draught of Living Death for a sneering Snape in a dank, dark dungeon (that was the last Harry Potter reference. I promise.). All it takes is a closed laptop, a comfortable chair, and a seriously awesome book. I'd recommend *Pride and Prejudice*, but that's only because I promised not to mention Harry Potter again. In all seriousness, though, leave your laptop behind and head over to the New York Public Library when you get a chance. Pick a book, any book, and dive right in. It might not be easy, but it will be worth it.

## A Most Convincing Deception

**BY HANNAH DREYFUS** *I have been to a place where gold meant less than dirt, and people less than gold. Apathy is a luxury no longer my own.*

On the 19th floor of 500 Central Park West, money drafts languidly around the room. Wafting in and out of conversations, it circles around to settle comfortably, confidently at the helm of the unspoken obvious.

The room is occupied up by a pretty party. College students mill about, thin champagne glasses clenched in palms, as desperately wanting to please as puppies. From a childhood spent watching adults attempt to navigate similar situations, they know what to say and how to say it. They know how to select hors d'oeuvres from the delicate trays being passed around (only touch one, only take one), they know how to modulate their tones, striking that ideally desired pitch of interest or excitement, and they know how to sidle up to proper people, warmly extending a hand for a firm, solid, but never presumptuous, shake. The young women, slim bodies showcased in black pencil skirts and precisely fitting suit jackets, flutter eyelashes thick with mascara and flex calves housed in sharp, sleek heels. If the young men are ever-so-slightly blundering, the young women, possessed of a special feminine prowess, compensate for their awkwardness, glimpses of insecurity the only traitors betraying their self-possessed carriage.

The scene itself convenes in a fishbowl; the small crowd the glorious, animated fish. The glass-encased living room is circular, enveloped by a smooth windowpane, looking out upon the shimmering New York skyline. Intricate glass sculptures adorn every table, catching the mellow light. One is of a dancing woman, mossy green and transparent, arms wrapped around her torso, neck extended towards the sky. A mystical being, quite at home in a world 19 flights up from reality.

*Attention.* With a tinkling of silver spoon on glass the room is called to order. The pleasant hum dies down to a gentle hush, as all eyes turn

to the concierge of the evening. "Students, if you could please take your seats. Mr. Silverman will be in to address you shortly."

Owning the Twin Towers must have been quite exciting. Perhaps it was just a real estate investment, like any other. But, there must have been something more to owning the tallest towers in the world. It's the difference between climbing a mountain and climbing Mt. Everest. Really, the action hauling oneself up the steep incline, step by wearisome step, is the same. But how utterly different the two statements; the latter accompanied by a certain pride, a certain smug defiance to which the former cannot lay claim. There must be a rumbling self-satisfaction in being able to declare, with verifiable conviction, that you own the tallest buildings in the world. In the most sought after City. Amid the most impressive ambiance. Tourists flock to admire what is yours, cameras strung unctuously around necks, hoping to brag about what they saw upon returning to their remote countries. A modern day Tower of Babylon; its fate, no less apocalyptic. But while they stood, two matchboxes proudly erect, the sky their only rival, it must have been quite thrilling to point up and say, those, see those, they are mine.

Larry Silverstein, like Gatsby, was disappointingly human. Strolling jauntily into the living room, he knocked over a folding chair on his way to the front. "Well, goodness, who put that there?" he guffawed bemusedly—and then onto more important matters, "Have you kids been eating these hors d'oeuvres? If you don't eat them, Klara and I are going to be stuck eating the leftovers for a week!" He takes a tray from a nearby waiter and prods it insistently in our direction. "Nu?" And who are we to say no to the hospitalities of Larry Silverstein? Dutifully, we take another bite-sized hamburger, complete with bun and tiny tomato slice, onto our plates, the more sycophantic among us taking two.

But 25 college students from elite universities did not convene, via special invitation, in the 19th floor penthouse apartment of real estate mogul

Larry Silverstein in order to merely consume mini-hamburgers. We were there on much more important business. We were there to discuss the future of mankind.

I qualify. We were there to discuss the future of the Jewish people, with regards to the State of Israel. Mr. Silverstein, an avid supporter and advocate for Israel, decided it his duty, as his hair grew white and the years ticked past, to share with the younger generation why we should care. Why Israel should be on our hearts and minds; why Israel should perch unapologetically atop our pocket books. To this end, he had extended a special invitation to delegates from all the top-tier universities (and no impressive name failed to make an appearance) to report to his place of residence on a chilly evening in January.

So sat around the Jewish future of America, knees crossed, suit jackets smartly ironed, hair curled in crisp, youthful tendrils, waiting expectantly.

"You kids are young, you don't remember what I remember. The State of Israel was founded on the heels of Auschwitz! Finally, it was a place we could be safe, secure. It was a land that was our own - no longer were we at the mercy of the rest of the world. We're not safe when we're strangers - we weren't safe in Europe, and we're not safe, here in America, now."

*Not safe here in America.* Set against the background of the New York City skyline. In an apartment with glittering chandeliers, magnificent works of art plastering the walls. Are we supposed to believe you? Are we supposed to respond? Shall we start rushing around madly, collecting our coats and belongings, before plunging out into the night to kiss our loved ones goodbye before bordering a plane to the Promised Land, one-way ticket? Like the Jews who left Egypt in the ancient proverbial vignette, do we even have time to let our dough rise, or shall we simply pack it away, flat as it is, and let it bake on our backs as we rush on towards destiny, fate throwing up her compass

in exasperated surrender and finally handing over the reins?

Can we believe you, sir, when you indeed seem quite comfortable? Why should we believe you, when we ourselves are quite comfortable?

His ominous tidings were met by blank, apathetic stares. One bold student reached across the room for another hors d'oeuvre.

In the audience that night, I felt more an observer than a participant. I came, with small notebook and pencil poised, prepared to take notes about political activism. I left, instead, with a notebook full of desperate scribbles. "Sitting in a fish-bowl on top of the world," "society's elite, but unmistakably, inescapably Jewish," "feigning sophistication—a most masterful performance," "in a building with four security guards, he tells us we're not safe." Phrases littering my pages. At the bottom of my last filled page, underlined twice, stood two words: "agonizing apathy."

I resist writing about the trip I took to Poland last spring. The snapshot images - ugly images, cruel images - are frozen in time, frozen in place, perfectly crystallized. Organized pristinely in my mind. That's how I want them to stay. I dare not rifle through those snapshots, lest they fall all at once to the floor in a mess I cannot order; in an overwhelming heap I cannot control.

One image persistently avoids evasion. I cannot remember precisely where I saw the picture - moving from site to site, camp to camp, the details mercifully blur. But the photograph itself remains in sharp focus. A young woman, clad in thick fur coat, hair light and short and fashionably coiffed. A young man, clad in sharp suit, standing chivalrously by her side. An attractive couple, meditating upon an attractive future. Neither the man nor the woman looked like some remnant from the shtetl, head scarf tied beneath the chin, posture slightly bent, expression slightly haggard. On the contrary - their features were slight, noses straight and aristocratic, bodies slim and graceful. The woman wore a small lace-trimmed hat.

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## At YU, Facing the Agunah Crisis

**BY PENINA WEIN** "Friends don't let friends get married without a prenup" was the slogan circulating both campuses on March 29, 2012, following the panel sponsored by TAC and the Agunah Advocacy Club, "Fighting the Agunah Crisis."

Moderated by Huvie Yagod, SCW '13, and founder of the Agunah Advocacy Club, the panel featured Rabbi Hershel Schachter, RIETS Rosh Yeshiva, Dr. David Pelcovitz, the Gwedolyn and Joseph Strauss Chair of Jewish Studies at Azrieli Graduate School, Rabbi Jeremy Stern, director of the Organization for the Resolution of Agunot (ORA), and Tamar Epstein, a current agunah. Informative and important, the evening offered much insight into the agunah crisis, and why it is an issue that no one should take lightly.

According to ORA's website, "an agunah (pl: agunot) is a woman whose marriage is functionally over, but whose husband cannot or refuses to give her a get (writ of Jewish divorce)." The absence of a halakhic divorce, whether or not a couple divorce civilly, can cause a woman to be "chained" for years, unable to remarry without the consent of her ex-husband. It is in a situation like this that someone has taken halakha and twisted it for his own benefit.

According to Pelcovitz, to withhold a get from someone without just cause is an act of emotional abuse. Rabbi Stern emphasized that not giving a get is the peak of abuse, where

the spouse is exerting the last possible amount of force that he can.

The agunah problem prompted a group of Yeshiva students to found ORA in 2002. After hearing about one particular case, some students planned a protest rally. This rally sprouted into a few more cases, and eventually grew into a professional, non-profit organization that has helped resolve 172 agunah cases, to date, and is currently helping 70 other women. Using halakhically acceptable and civilly legal methods, ORA helps to facilitate advocacy to resolve the agunah's situation in as amicable a fashion as possible.

ORA has been instrumental in helping Epstein, a current agunah and speaker at the panel, in particular. Four months after having her first child, and after realizing that the problems in her marriage were not improving, she asked her husband, Aharon Friedman, for a divorce. For the first two years after this request, there was no pressure placed on Friedman to give a get, and so Epstein's request went unanswered. However, after two years and with the advice of her father, Epstein decided to formally ask Friedman for a get again. He responded angrily. Epstein then realized that being patient was not going to give her the results that she needed, and that was when she turned to ORA.

In the two years since then she has not received a get, but Epstein says that she would not be anywhere close to where she is

today without the commitment and support of ORA and its rabbanim. At the panel, Epstein emphasized that one of the main emotions that an agunah might feel is isolated, but, with the outpouring of support she has received, Epstein explained that she feels embraced and loved by the Jewish community. According to Epstein, her support network is what has allowed her to continue each day.

Yagod was taught by Epstein's mother in high school. After hearing stories like those of Epstein and other women, and attending rallies with ORA, she was inspired. "We as a community must not tolerate when there is abuse," said Yagod at the March 29 panel.

Spearheaded by Yagod, the club slipped prenuptial agreements under the door into every undergraduate student's dorm room. These prenuptial agreements are forms that many Rabbanim encourage young couples to sign before getting married. The club hoped that these folders would help enable students who did not know about the pre-nup to have access and become familiar with its use before approaching marriage.

The prenuptial agreement is a form, consisting of two documents, created by Rabbi Mordechai Willig, YU Rosh Yeshiva, along with the help of a lawyer. One document allows couples to authorize a specific *beit din* to handle the divorce, should one occur. The other document states that in the event that the *beit din* should determine the husband is improperly withholding the get,

he is obligated to pay his wife a significant sum of money. This is in the hopes that the man will not want to or be able to afford to pay, and will instead give his wife a get. Should a woman need help receiving her get during a divorce, it is extremely helpful.

Some rabbanim do not recommend using the pre-nup, as they think it reflects inherent distrust within the couple and begins the marriage on the wrong foot. According to Rabbi Stern, there is also a stigma associated with signing the pre-nup that needs to be broken within our community. Other rabbanim object to signing it on a technical halakhic basis. However, many, including Rabbi Schachter, and most of the YU Roshei Yeshiva, recommend that every couple getting married should sign one.

If a man does not want to sign a pre-nup, said Stern, it should be a red-flag to the women. "Signing a pre-nup says, 'I love you so much that I never want to hurt you,'" he said.

Rabbi Stern emphasized that our community should work as hard as possible to make the pre-nuptial agreement a communal standard. "No community is immune" from the agunah problem, Stern said. He, along with many others, hopes that the pre-nup will solve the agunah crisis and save many other women from this potential problem. "It is my hope that in 10 years, ORA will have no more cases."

## AIPAC 2012: Student Leaders Speak

**BY: HANNAH DREYFUS** *Looking for the facts*—at the recent 2012 AIPAC Conference in Washington D.C., the pursuit of intellectual honesty was the reoccurring theme that characterized my many and diverse interviews with students from across the country. I entered the conference, along with 2,000 other student leaders and activists, asking *why*: why did students, from incredibly varying backgrounds, choose to attend?

"As student body president of nearly 18,500 undergraduate and graduate students, it is my responsibility to be knowledgeable about the all the students I represent," explained Austin Graham, a composed senior from New Mexico State University. "That means knowing about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a Palestinian perspective, and that means knowing about the conflict from Israel's perspective. I am here to learn. I'm here because it my responsibility to educate myself from every angle."

Yevin Roth, another student body president, a Korean-American senior studying Public Health at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, was also attending the conference to broaden his understanding of the Middle-Eastern controversy. Roth did not fail to mention the importance of taking everything he heard at a conference with "a grain of salt."

"Yes, salt is the most important spice," he laughed bemusedly, a note of skepticism in his tone. "Nationalism and truth have always been difficult to reconcile. But, at the end of the day, truth must win out."

Roth's comment alluded to a covert tension that exists between advocating for the State of Israel, and agreeing with all of Israel's policies. "One of the things I struggle with about AIPAC," confessed Danielle Meidan, a dual American/Israeli citizen who is a freshman at University of California, Santa Cruz, "is their presentation of Israel as a country without faults. We need to be able to learn about Israel's faults and missteps so that we can understand, acknowledge, and refute *illegitimate* claims about Israel." A freshman, Meidan has already become

highly involved in the pro-Israel activism on campus. "I face a lot of antagonism," she said, "but I'm prepared to stand up and fight for the country that's my home."

Hailing from a Modern-Orthodox perspective, Chesky Kopel, a third year student at Yeshiva, was not hesitant to express certain apparent "inconsistencies" between deed and creed gleaned from Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech on Tuesday night.

"I couldn't help but question his unequivocal statement, 'I will never gamble on the security of the State of Israel,'" Kopel expressed shortly after the speech, "Just five months ago, this

of Pennsylvania. Following on the heels of the recent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions conference that took place on campus, the large delegation of students from Penn were not strangers to adversity. "On campus, we don't mix friends and politics," explained Joshua Spector, deputy committee leader for PIPAC (Penn Israel Public Action Committee). "We are friends with the students from Penn for Palestine. But, when it comes down to representing Israel, being an effective advocate means knowing the facts. Advocating for Israel doesn't mean claiming Israel is perfect—it means supporting Israel's essential right to exist and right to defend itself. Like President Obama said in his speech, 'On the big things, we agree.'"

The tangible drive for honesty and determination to confront complexity was evident from student responses. But the quest for intellectual honesty did not divorce raw emotion from the issue.

"I'm looking for answers because I care," said Laina Pauker, first year student at Clark University, a small liberal arts college in Worcester, Massachusetts that had no pro-Israel group on campus until Laina and three other students

same man released 1,027 prisoners who had been convicted on terrorist charges. To declare war on Iran is a gamble of the security of the state. Not to declare war is also a gamble on the security of the state. This issue is a complicated one, and the prime minister's display of overconfidence is frankly disconcerting."

Simplicity is not something students are prepared to stomach easily—not students from fairly homogenous Yeshiva, and not students from some of the most diverse, liberal college campuses in the States.

Sitara Nayuda, UC Irvine's former student body president, spoke candidly about the anti-Israel sentiment on campus, and the outstanding pro-Israel student efforts in response.

"Yes, we have an extremely diverse student population, and students are not hesitant to speak out against Israel. But we have some of the most active, dynamic pro-Israel action taking place on campus as well," stated Nayuda. "I'm here to learn and to deepen my understanding of both sides of the issue."

Being exposed to both sides of the issue is no novelty to students from University

**"ADVOCATING FOR ISRAEL DOESN'T MEAN CLAIMING ISRAEL IS PERFECT—IT MEANS SUPPORTING ISRAEL'S ESSENTIAL RIGHT TO EXIST AND RIGHT TO DEFEND ITSELF."**

## A Most Convincing Deception

*continued from page 6*  
tipped coquettishly to the side. They were standing outdoors. Their hands were up. Guns were pointed at them from behind, by soldiers, humanity discarded somewhere along the dusty road. Their faces were writhed with fear.

More than a thousand empty shoes and barracks, that picture scared me. A mirage of security, unceremoniously dismantled, leaving victims more naked to disbelief than the biting night air.

Larry Silverstein ominous warnings were lost on most,

inconspicuously checking gold wrist watches, wondering how much longer it will be until they can venture out into the electric streets of New York, pounding below. His words were not lost on me. Images held at bay for so long swooped back into my mind, shifting in and out of focus. Eyeglasses heaped in a looming pile, ownerless. Fastidiously labeled luggage, never reaching anticipated destinations. My own reflection, staring back at me from a window, eyes pleading for escape. The fur coat remaining quietly in the center of the swirling images.

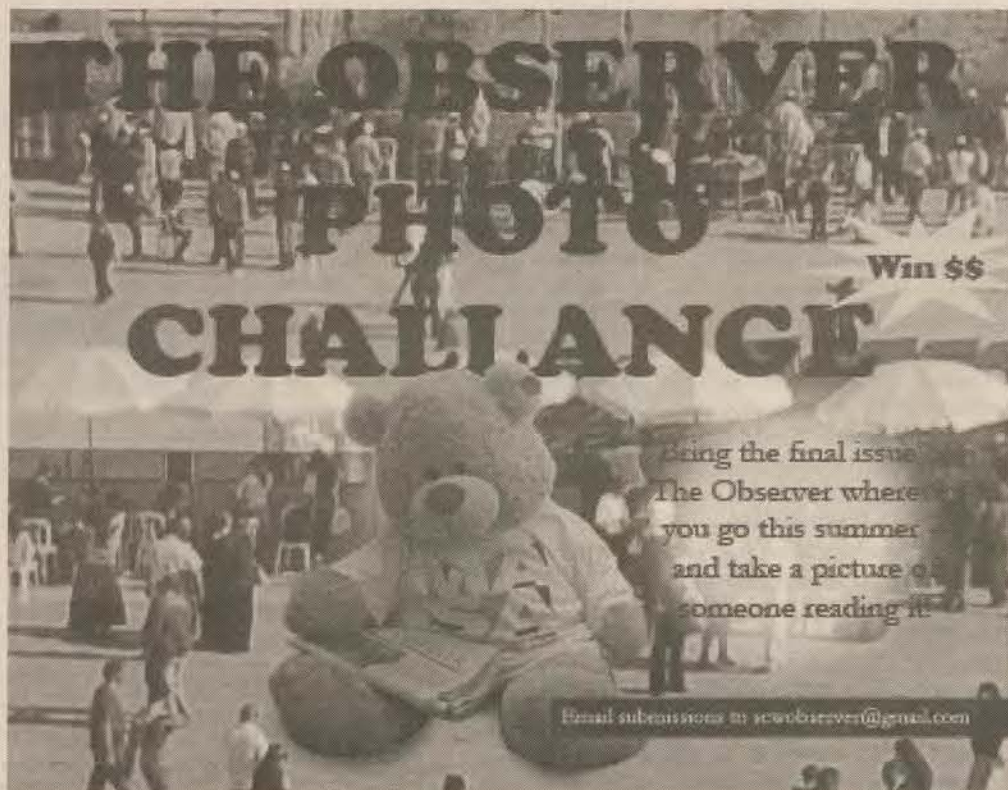
decided it was an imperative. "When I arrived on the campus this year, 'free Palestine' was chalked all over place. Students thought being 'liberal' was equated with hating Israel. And, among other students, there was just a lot of ignorance. I felt it my responsibility to change that."

One pro-Israel student group (CHAI: Clarkies Helping and Advocating for

Israel) and several successful events later, sentiments on campus have already started to change.

"I'm not looking for conflict. All I'm looking for is peace. Peace requires discussion. And any real discussion requires two knowledgeable parties, prepared to talk and ready to listen."

Words from a 20-year-old; perhaps one day the world will take heed.



## Correcting a Travesty, Preventing Tragedy: The Agunah Advocacy Club

**BY: TALI ADLER** By now almost every student at Stern College for Women is familiar with the name Tamar Epstein. Described by Failed Messiah as "the world's most famous *agunah*," Epstein has been an *agunah* for four years now; her husband, Aharon Friedman, has repeatedly refused to grant her a *get*. Students have participated in rallies, written letters to her husband's boss in the House of Representatives, and posted on Facebook in order to raise awareness about her predicament and that of other *agunot* like her. Many of us have started to feel personally connected to this young woman whose life has been partially frozen by her husband's refusal to grant her a Jewish divorce.

For Ahuva Yagod, the founder and president of the new Agunah Advocacy Club at YU, and known to her friends as Huvie, Tamar Epstein's struggle really is personal. Tamar is the daughter of Mrs. Epstein, one of Yagod's high school teachers. During my senior year of high school, Yagod explains, "Mrs. Epstein's husband had passed away and the whole school really felt united with the family. To hear that, on top of everything else, Aharon Friedman had refused to give a *get* before Dr. Epstein passed away - I wanted to help."

While many of us have felt a desire to help in the struggle to free *agunot* from dead marriages at some point, Yagod refused to be satisfied with mere sympathy. She became involved

with the Organization for the Rights of Agunot and spent her Sundays attending rallies against recalcitrant husbands. This year, Yagod decided to spread her work to the rest of the YU student body by founding the Agunah Advocacy Club in order to raise awareness of and organize student efforts on behalf of *agunot* like Tamar Epstein.

Founded earlier this semester, the Agunah Advocacy Club has already made a significant impact at YU as one of sponsors of the widely attended "Fighting the Agunah Crisis" panel, which was designed to raise student awareness about the plight of *agunot* and encourage the Orthodox community to have "zero-tolerance" for *get*-refusers. Ms. Epstein discussed communal responsibility towards

the *agunah* and stated that "we, as a community, have a responsibility to protect her and ensure her release and we can achieve that goal if we ourselves, our institutions and our leadership accept a zero-tolerance policy on *get* refusal." Panelists also encouraged attendees to sign the Halakhic Prenup, a suggestion Sarah Marvin and Betzalel Bacon, an engaged couple, decided to implement immediately.

Yagod says that of all of the Agunah Advocacy Club's efforts she is proudest of the panel and the impact that it made on the YU student body. Still, the club refuses to be satisfied with its efforts thus far. When asked about future plans for the club, Yagod replies, "The challenge we face next year is keeping this issue

relevant. I don't want to organize a panel only to have a meager turnout because people feel they've heard it all before. To that end, we want to create events that look at the issue of *agunot* from different angles." When asked about what other students can do to help, Yagod excitedly answers, "Show up to events! *Agunot* hear about it and it gives them so much support. I just got a Facebook message from a woman who heard from her mother how I show up to rallies and try to bring others with; she really appreciated it. Tamar was so moved by the large crowd when she spoke. And come to rallies! Every additional body makes a difference!"

# Reclaiming Our Identity as an All Women's College

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of women's history," said Nachumi. "The all-women's environment precipitates this goal."

The Women's Studies Society has been active on campus and hopes to partner with other clubs to create more 'women-centric' events. Just this past semester, the Society hosted four events and intends to increase their efforts by adding more board members and engaging more students. Sarah Lazoros SCW '13, one of the first Women's Studies majors at Stern, and the President of the Women's Studies Society, said, "It's important for the Women's Society to be well known across campus, because everything that the women's society is built on, Stern is built on."

However, the negative stereotypes associated with all-women's college cannot be ignored. Many times the stereotypes that pervade the choice to go to Stern make students self-conscious of their decision. Statements like, "She just wants her M.R.S. degree" or, "the easy option for Orthodox women" undermine the deliberate decision to choose Stern because it is, along with many other unique attributes, an all-women's college.

Rachel Benaim, SCW '13, a student leader involved on campus, is quite aware of negative "Stern Girl" stereotype. She, however, is unwilling to buy into the negativity. "Why let public perception affect the role you take on in order to better the school?" said Benaim. "As a whole, Stern students *do* utilize the power, potential, and possibilities offered uniquely by an all women's institution. So many people are involved. Just look at the recent student council elections - so many students chose to run. For people who cry 'apathy,' it's worth first looking at the facts."

SCW is not the only one of being an all women's institution within a larger university. Located 80 blocks away, Barnard College is an all-woman's college, offering a Women's Studies Department and major, emphasizing female empowerment. At the same time, Barnard's special partnership with Columbia University allows its women access to Ivy League courses and resources. Rivka Holzer, BC '15, said, "I chose to attend Barnard because I liked the fact that it was all women, while remaining part of Columbia. You get the best of both worlds."

Emily Feldman, BC '15, agrees with Holzer, but points out that since Barnard and Columbia students can cross-register for courses, "A Barnard student can take pride in her women's college while still feel academically connected to the greater university community." In this aspect, Stern differs from Barnard. Stern women are only able to take classes at Yeshiva College in very special circumstances; even then, it is not encouraged.

With a shared mission statement with other undergraduate and graduate programs, students are proud to belong to Yeshiva. Some find it difficult to then establish our own identity; our own campus, clubs, and courses that earmark us as separate. These very exclusive aspects of our women's college provide us with so much opportunity for school pride.

Nevertheless, attendance and enthusiasm towards Stern-centric events is oftentimes disappointing. With constant shuttling to events uptown, there is often a disappointing turnout with so many pleading 'already went to the Heights' syndrome.

The turnout at the Stern College

Dramatic Society's recent performance of *The Mad Woman of Chaillot* typified this problem. Hannah Dreyfus, SCW '14, an actress in both of this year's productions, commented that, "I was rather surprised at how few women showed up to support SCDS. As an all women's cast and crew, we need the support of a women's audience. If we don't support our own, the future of the Dramatics Society will be put in jeopardy, especially in light of the harsh economic climate and budget cuts. Such an important and unique outlet for women, it would be deeply unfortunate to let slip."

Though many of the large campus clubs and societies have a young man and woman as co-presidents, there are a fair amount of student clubs and organizations that consist of an all-women board, including the Beit

Medrash Committee and other smaller clubs. All of these have potential to be empowering, yet at times are simply undernourished aspects of our institution. Specifically, the athletics and performing arts societies could use significantly more "womanpower" to continue and thrive.

Margot Reinstein, SCW '13, incoming TAC President for 2012-13 and member of the B'Notes, Stern's a capella group, hopes to raise awareness about all the exciting events going on at Stern. "I hope to give the B'Notes a bigger budget so they can continue to empower women in Stern and across the world (like the Maccabeats!). In general, there are so many opportunities here that people don't know about; there is so much here to do that sometimes people are overwhelmed, but instead they should be excited. Once you get involved in Stern, you

begin to love it."


When the lines are blurred between SCW and YC, one might question, "Well, what school do I go to anyway?" While it is impossible to suggest that SCW should be independent from Yeshiva University, it is crucial to view our school as different and unique entity. Greater efforts to attend our SCDS performances, give the B'Notes the recognition they deserve, and rally together for our sports teams will increase our campus pride and strengthen the connections with the women of Stern have with one another.

Next time, forgo a shuttle ride up to the heights to attend an event on the Stern Campus. After all, the slogan is ours as well: "Nowhere but here."


TORAH

SHANDA


SHKOYACH




The new campaign for a block of limudei kodesh time every morning in Stern is happening at the same time that YC students are decrying their shiur system. Are we sure this is what we want?



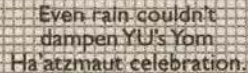
Separate from Haatzmaut celebrations for the Yeshiva. Three cheers for a united student body!



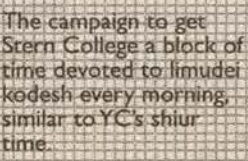
Playing the new Maccabeats album out loud in the Beit Midrash. Headphones, people.



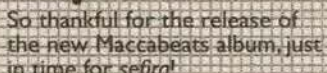
Agunah panel. Thank you to TAC and the Agunah Advocacy Club for shining a light on these important issues.



Even rain couldn't dampen YU's Yom Haatzmaut celebration.



The campaign to get Stern College a block of time devoted to limudei kodesh every morning, similar to YC's shiur time.



So thankful for the release of the new Maccabeats album, just in time for sefir!

Tough showdown at the YC town hall meeting. Budget cuts are bad, but misleading accusations don't help matters at all.

Please, for the love of all that is holy, stop trying to make your studies more interesting by mentioning dating completely out of context.

The fall 2012 schedule shows an entire month of vacation during the chagim. Budget cuts obviously have their advantages.

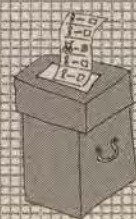
Cutting speech and language classes at YC. Really, enough said.

A note to YU writers: uncomfortable pseudonyms, while "momentarily gripping," do nothing to add to the gravitas of your articles. Please avoid.

The resurgence of democracy in Stern. Multiple candidates running for the same position, published campaign platforms, efforts to meet constituents: the Stern elections are looking better than the Republican primaries right now.

Event conflicts. While we appreciate the plethora of interesting events available to YU students, we'd appreciate them even more if an entire semester's worth didn't take place on the same night.

While the confusion surrounding council elections was amusing at first, there really is a limit. This is not the year 2000, and we do not live in Florida.



Congratulations to YCDS for their great production of *The Foreigner*. I want a bright orange "blasny, blasny" shirt, please.

MADDA



## Out of Spiritual Commission? A Seminary Retrospective

**BY HANNAH DREYFUS** My seminary Rabbi called me a broken fan.

Last June, at a festive end of year colloquium, one of my seminary's most beloved Rabbis was invited to speak. He presented his wide-eyed, attentive audience with the particularly vivid analogy of an unplugged fan. While plugged in, a fan whirrs along busily, conscientiously, dutifully, zealously, to the great appreciation of all present. There is nothing more productive, more laudable, than a plugged-in fan, merrily achieving what it was created to achieve. Then, there is the sad, unfortunate scene of an unplugged fan. Its source of energy unexpectedly severed, the cheerfully spinning panels start to slow and stutter, eventually coming to a half-hearted, unceremonious halt; the wind literally taken out of their sails. A sad, teetering, indecisive close to what could have been a most promising career.

This sagacious individual did

not risk leaving his polemic to the indeterminate realm of metaphor. The follow-up elucidation went something like this: "Here, in seminary, you are a plugged-in fan. Connected to the Source [qualified in frustratingly vague terminology, including 'Yiddeshkeit,' 'Torah,' and 'Hashem'] you whirr along contentedly, until, at the year's close, you are rudely, abruptly disconnected. Your job, dear students," said he, "is to reconnect to the 'Source' in the vacuum of spiritual meaning [codeword for college] into which you are soon bound to fall. The picture he painted was a sorry one indeed: the gates of seminary closing with a final clang, and we, noses pressed against the cold iron, looking back wistfully at the people we once were.

The message, albeit presented in significantly less elegant prose, foreshadowed some vital loss bound to accompany change. In accordance with the analogy, our seminary selves were productive, goal-oriented individuals,

existences meaningful and validated. Our post-seminary selves: individuals scrambling for meaning, enduring an existence without drive, cause, reason, or aim.

At the time, I, along with my 20 or so comrades, listened with all earnestness, shuddering at the lonely fate that seemed to lie in wait. We thanked our Rabbi sincerely, silently promising ourselves never to become the unplugged fans of which he so ominously spoke.

One year later, that analogy irks me irreconcilably. To my great frustration, I have not been able to successfully rid myself of the image. The picture conjured up by the analogy, a sorry fan enjoying its last life-infused strokes, has served to feed the undue pangs of guilt characteristic of the post-seminary readjustment back into "real life."

The idea that in seminary you have somehow arrived, that you have discovered your *raison d'être*, and the rest of your life, or college career at

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least (until that long-awaited moment when you ride off into the sunset with Prince Charming and set up shop in the Heights) must be spent playing catch-up, is particularly pernicious. And, more than harmful, the image is deeply inaccurate.

One's spiritual journey is a process, a constant, continual development. It cannot and should not be pegged to one isolated time frame. It would indeed be a sorry reality if your spiritual "climax" was reached at the ripe old age of 18. Spiritual "growth," as it is colloquially termed, is not a linear progression, but a cohesive, holistic, often meandering, exploration. Goals

and visions form a mold, a basic outline - the method of attaining those goals is essentially and necessarily protean in nature.

During a recent phone conversation with a friend who is currently in seminary, I listened to her prattle on about all the various things she is learning, and how wonderful it is, etc. To which I cheerfully responded, "Gosh, you just make me feel so out of spiritual commission."

That comment, that thought process, needs to be fought against. Limiting spirituality to one, crystallized, rigid image is not helpful, mature, or  
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## All is Fair in Fantasy

**BY AIMEE RUBENSTEIN** Walt Disney has crushed my dreams of living happily ever after. Although the protagonist in every Disney fairytale overcomes his or her obstacles and achieves success and happiness, I now understand that realistically, it will never happen to me.

As a modern-Orthodox 21-year-old with five friends engaged in two months, I have a keen interest in love and marriage. As Disney continually idealizes the world and masks reality, viewers continually respond sentimentally and deceive themselves. I will confess that not only have I given into the fantasy of meeting my Prince Charming, I have devoted superfluous hours to emulating Cinderella herself, when I acted as Cinderella in my high school Rodger and Hammerstein's rendition of the musical. As I delved into the character of the infamous Cinderella, I found myself repeating my rehearsed lines offstage. The more dedicated I was toward my character, the more I saw the

difference between myself as a chirping princess in a fairytale and myself as an independent person in a sentimental world.

My perception of the fairytale was finally addressed when I read Peggy Orenstein's *Cinderella Ate My Daughter* and then interviewed her at SCW. After she held a discussion entitled "From Princesses to Pop-Tarts: A Look at the New Culture of Girlhood," I identified with the way she exposed Disney Princesses' commerciality and influence. Are all girls sucked into society's pink vacuum? While many are comfortable with the mold society shapes, I am not.

Orenstein solidified my belief that I will never meet my Prince Charming, maybe because he only exists for Disney Princesses. This garnered my interest in the connection between the way women judge things based on their personal appearances, beliefs and experiences and the way they judge themselves as a potential mate. After speaking with Orenstein, I questioned, if

human perception is continually changing and our personalities are malleable enough to be impacted by Disney productions, then why do we not all look, love and live the same way?

If Disney has exposed the lack of reality in his films, and Orenstein offers no solace in her literature, is there hope for my inner-Princess? While researching Cinderella to better play the character on my high school stage, I was surprised by her origins. Also known as Aschenputtel by Brothers Grimm, Cinderella embodies the rags to riches story. Furthermore, the fairy tale, which originated from folklore, blurs the line between fantasy and reality. The audience continuously views Cinderella as an authentic role model, when in truth she is living in a fantasy. While Orenstein determines the Cinderella character is a mirage, Disney continually tells every little girl that she must prefer the perfect, royal lifestyle, despite its fictitious nature. It is readily apparent that Disney should reevaluate its message

before waving his magic wand, even though the balance between fairy tales and reality remains a blur.

Unsatisfied, I continued to look for an answer and finally found it in one sentence. The words of designer Richard Seymour spoke more to me than the four billion dollar Disney franchise. While discussing beauty, Seymour said, "We see things not as they are, but as we are." Before looking for someone to fit into our preconceived fairytale, first, we must look for ourselves. Before looking for someone to fit into our preconceived fairytale, first, we must look for ourselves. Before Cinderella miraculously found her Prince Charming, she reconsidered her life as a maid to her and internalized that she deserved something better. While all Cinderella needed was a fairy godmother to whip up her happily ever after, perhaps all we need is to reflect upon ourselves in order to write our own love stories. Forget the magic wands, we need some mirrors.

## Stern College's Obligation to Obligate Prenups

**BY DR. RACHEL LEVMORE** After having periodically been given the metaphoric cursory nod of recognition during the past ten years, the *agunah* problem has hit Stern College full-force. A Stern graduate, who epitomizes the *mensch* the school strives to produce, has been turned into an *agunah*.

The message that Stern College gives its students is complex, in keeping with the complex world of American Modern Orthodoxy. Top level academia with top-level *yirat shamayim* together with top level *eshet chayil* homemaking is presumably the aims that Stern College strives to inculcate in the students. These bright, committed young women entrust the teachers, professors, *rebbeim* and administration at Stern and Yeshiva University in general, with their futures. The women open their minds and hearts to absorb all the lofty messages,

philosophies, halakhic practices that can possibly be transmitted from the top level faculty, alongside the cutting-edge scholarship.

A Stern College graduate, Tamar Epstein, married a man who on paper seemed to epitomize the ultimate *chossan* one would wish on every Stern girl. A *frum* Harvard law graduate, with a glorious career ahead of him. Indeed, this fellow reached the highest echelons of government with a kippah on his head. Is this not the pinnacle of American Modern Orthodoxy? Unfortunately, when Ms. Epstein realized that she had made a mistake she found herself embroiled in a severe case of *get-refusal*. Instead of being admired as a *kiddush Hashem*, the man was vilified in the public media in what is a true *chillul Hashem*. But all this came too little and too late. Another "Modern-Day *Agunah*" was created.

The term "Modern-Day *Agunah*" was coined in a Dec. 1999 *kol koreh* - a publicized message

emanating from a group of eleven leading *roshei yeshiva* at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University, including Rabbi Hershel Schachter and Rabbi Mordechai Willig, which endorsed halakhic prenuptial agreements. It can be viewed, more than twelve years later, at [theprenup.org](http://theprenup.org). The *roshei yeshiva* stated that they "strongly urge all officiating rabbis to counsel and encourage marrying couples to sign such an agreement."

The prenuptial agreement of the Beth Din of America had been developed by Rabbi Mordechai Willig, a *rosh yeshiva* of RIETS. Yeshiva University's other leading *rabbanim* simply cannot say, "We tried...we issued a *kol koreh*." The *agunot* in the United States today belie the validity of that attitude. Just the opposite - if one begins a *mitzvah*, one must finish it.

Twice in the past few months, Rabbi Hershel Schachter spoke to Yeshiva University students

- both men and women - and recommended to every marrying couple "to fill out this prenuptial agreement" while referring to the Binding Arbitration Agreement of the Beth Din of America. Both in Israel in January, and in New York in March, Rabbi Schachter explained the halakhic rationale of the prenuptial agreement.

The time has come for Stern College to take a stand as "Stern College" - its *rabbanim*, teachers, administration - clarifying that each and every student of Stern and her *chossan* sign a prenup. This should have been done years ago, especially taking into account the Dec 1999 "Kol Koreh" of the 11 *Roshei Yeshiva* of YU and the latest public lectures of one of YU's leading *poskim*. Although Stern is an "academic" institution-it is more than that. It is a "yeshiva" institution which prepares  
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## Inherit the Flag

**BY RENEE KESTENBAUM** "Parents, get your cameras ready," announced the ranger over the top of an outstretched American flag and the heads of the two dozen young citizens who held it aloft. Any Boy or Girl Scouts present were about to earn their citizenship badges, he said, for helping to fold the flag.

It was closing time at Fort McHenry, the Baltimore site of the British bombardment that inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star Spangled Banner" during the War of 1812. In later incarnations, the fort was used to train troops, to imprison Confederate soldiers, and as a hospital. It became a national park in 1933, and on a bright, cloudy day in April, was the site of my family's Chol Hamoed outing.

We enjoyed the introductory video in the visitor's center, picnicking on the grounds, and posing in front of historical cannons. We eventually meandered to where the historical 15-starred flag is lowered ceremonially at the park's close each day, just in time for the demonstration.

My cousins gingerly held the bits of the flag that they were closest to, watching the ranger with slack-jawed reverence. I couldn't tell how much of the demonstration they understood, but they waited for their turn to do their parts, excited for their important roles.

Looking over the dark heads of my little cousins, I was strongly struck by the irony. None of the three had been born in the United States, the girl in Canada and the two boys in Israel. They had lived in Israel for the past five years. Their parents are strong Zionists. Watching them hold the massive flag with reverence, I wondered at their relationship with America, with the flag, and I wondered, too, if they might someday fold and handle the Israeli flag with such respect.

The respect with which the American flag is treated is established in the guidelines of the "Flag Code," Title 4 of the United States Code. The code, which derives from old national customs and was codified in 1923, sets out when, where, and how the flag should be publicly displayed; for example, the flag may only be displayed between sunrise and sunset, and so when Fort McHenry prepared to close for the day the flag had to be lowered.

Above all, the guidelines reinforce a respect that an American citizen must demonstrate toward the flag. This respect is often demonstrated through the superior visual placement of the American flag above anything else on public display. For example, 4 U.S.C § 7 states, "When flags

of States, cities, or localities, or pennants of societies are flown on the same halyard with the flag of the United States, the latter should always be at the peak" and, similarly, "No person shall display the flag of the United Nations or any other national or international flag equal, above, or in a position of superior prominence or honor to or in place of the flag of the United States..." 4 U.S.C § 7. The flag is treated like a precious object of high stature. In a way, it is elevated because it is a symbol of the United States as a nation, a government, a military, and an idea - it is everything, everyone, and all-inclusive.

The park ranger explained 4 U.S.C § 8, that the reason the children were holding the flag is because "the flag should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, the floor, water, or merchandise," and then went on to explain and demonstrate how to fold the flag.

I tried to capture my cousins' faces on video, myself stunned. The proper way to fold a flag? The piece of fabric, dyed certain colors in a certain pattern, gets treated with more pomp and respect than many people. I had never before seen such a simple object treated with such respect and, moreover orderly, prescribed respect.

Oh, wait. Yes, I had. The directives to keep the flag off the ground, and to "destroy [it] in a dignified way...[when] it is no longer a fitting emblem for display" 4 U.S.C § 8 reminded me of the way we treat Torah scrolls. It well-known that dropping a Torah scroll on the ground requires 40 days of fasting to make up for. A Torah scroll is never casually discarded, but "destroyed with dignity" - given a burial - just like the American flag.

The United States Flag Code states that flag must be destroyed when it is "no longer a fitting emblem for display." A Torah is destroyed when it is *pasul*, no longer fit to be *read from*. In this, we see that the Torah's purpose is to be read, to teach, to inspire.

But the Torah, though sometimes an emblem or a symbol, is not a flag.



There are strict rules about how to treat the American flag. What about the Israeli flag?

Compared to the American flag, the Israeli flag has far fewer prescriptions than does the American flag. Israel's rules of the flag are much shorter, and much less detailed. They discuss the respect to be shown upon seeing the flag and hearing the national anthem, but little about how the physical flag is to be treated, how it is to be folded and which direction it should face and how it should be discarded.

One of the more interesting passages that stands out in the United States Flag Code, is the following: "The flag should never be used as wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery" 4 U.S.C § 8. This is interesting both as an example of meticulous thoughtfulness with which the Code was drafted (why would anyone think of specifying that no one may use a flag as bedding?) and because it contrasts so strongly with the way we often treat the Israeli flag.

The Israeli flag often gets used as apparel: any time a dancing circle gets started and someone runs through the center with an Israeli flag knotted around their shoulders. Check out the pictures from the Yom Ha'atzmaut chagigah, you'll see this several times.

Obviously we don't desecrate the Israeli flag, but treating it with moderate respect - natural but not forced and delineated to the nth degree, keeps the flag and all it represents (Israel and Zionism, among others) a part of our life's experience. Like the Torah, whose purpose is to be read and to inspire.

My cousins love Fort McHenry. They've helped to lower and fold the flag many times. Yet, throughout handling and caring for the American flag, the symbol of the United States, Israel is still their home.

## Out of Spiritual Commission? A Seminary Retrospective

*continued from page 9*

realistic. It is a set-up for unnecessary guilt and an impediment towards progress. As life changes, we change - we are not expected to stay the same. What may have been an "ideal" for someone during his/her year in Israel may not be an ideal for him/her now - not because he has plummeted from spiritual grace, not because he has taken a steep and heedless dive off the "religious" plateau where he temporarily held fort, but because different circumstances demand and deserve different responses.

This article, and my subsequent thought processes, pivot around the question: is there one, immutable ideal, into which rigid contours one must work to fit his constantly shifting life circumstances? Or, are different ideals produced by different circumstances? Is there one, overarching destination point, or is striving itself, in whichever context life provides, a destination point within itself?

I affirmatively argue the latter. Ideals must change as life invariably changes. If we refuse to rethink, reassess, and reform ideals, we will be left looking back, and not forwards.

I am not the person I was, heavily rolling my suitcase away from seminary one year ago. I have spent time learning different things, meeting new people, sampling new experiences. Have I changed? Most definitely. My definition of spiritual

growth has expanded far beyond the *Beit Midrash*, beyond walking to the *Kotel* every Wednesday afternoon, beyond learning Rav Dessler on a grassy hilltop overlooking Jerusalem. In no way do I intend to detract from the importance of these experiences - for one time and place, they were an ideal. But this year, a new ideal, shaped in light of new circumstance and not *despite* new circumstance, has taken form. I have found inspiration in unanticipated locales - literary criticism, intellectual history, modern art. I've found beauty and serenity in the streets of New York, although I no longer have the privilege to walk through the streets of Jerusalem. But it is a change I refuse to look upon with disdain or nostalgia. If, last year, I subscribed, consciously or unconsciously, to the idea of one, stagnant, rigid, unforgiving ideal, it is an idea to which I no longer subscribe. Today, I subscribe to maximizing circumstance; not wistfully wishing circumstance conformed to some idealized picture of what was.

I hope never again to think of myself as a fan that has stopped whirring. I am, instead, a fan persistently seeking new sources of inspiration and drive; greeting each uniquely different day as it comes, with excitement and anticipation.

You know, after all, I'm more of the literal type. Perhaps I'll let my Rabbi know.

**Comments?**

**Questions?**

**Write to us!**

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## Stern College's Obligation to Obligate Prenups

*continued from page 9*

its students for a successful Orthodox Jewish life on many levels. It is not enough to sanction the holding of events where outsiders/professionals come to speak to the student body about the *agunah* problem and prenuptial agreements. That was done when Tamar Epstein was a student and did nothing to prevent her from becoming an *agunah*. As teachers, *mechanchim*, professors and religious leaders we are responsible for these women and we do not know whom they will want to marry or who will be their *mesader kiddushin*. We have to empower the women

to be able to say - it is my community's *minhag* - the "Stern College requirement" - that every couple must sign a prenup. If indeed it is issued as a school policy, *psak* or a similar form--then it will not be difficult for the women to insist on a prenup when the time comes. The result will be that it will become common knowledge that if a young man is set to go out with a "Stern Girl" - he will be required to sign a prenup if they become engaged. It will be part of the package. There is no doubt that the Stern college administration can find the way to do this in an acceptable manner.

Stern College for Women is described as

"empowering each student to claim her own voice and forge her own path". Stern College is part of Yeshiva University which states that "One of the foundations of Yeshiva University is the importance of enriching and enhancing Jewish life and growth both on our campuses and in the Jewish community at large." There is no field more important in which the students of Stern College need empowerment as ensuring that not one student will become an *agunah*. If Yeshiva University seeks to enhance Jewish life for the individual and in the community, its rabbinic leaders and faculty are responsible to set their students out on the path of that life with

the proper halakhic tools to do so. A clear policy must be set by the school's leadership and *rabbonim*.

Rachel Levmore (YUHSGB '71), PhD in Talmud & Torah Shebe'alpeh from Bar-Ilan University, is a *to'enet rabbanit-rabbinical court advocate, coordinator of the Get Refusal Prevention Project of the Council of Young Israel Rabbis and the Jewish Agency, and author of the Hebrew book Minee Einayich Medima on prenuptial agreements for the prevention of get refusal.*

## An Oasis at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Respite for Undergraduate Students

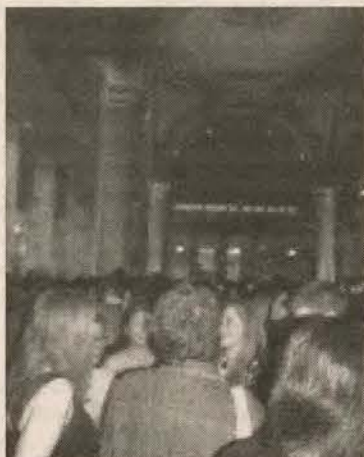
**BY AIMEE RUBENSTEEN** Every time exam week overwhelms undergraduate students, everyone flees to their many stress-relievers. Respite may be found in sporadic napping or compulsive exercise, but I favor strolling through museums. Every time I walk through the galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the paintings seem to foster my much-needed slow-paced momentum. Therefore, the Met has continually been my oasis of calm in a cacophonous city. Clearly, I was not the only student finding an escape in the acclaimed museum, when I learned about the museum's event for college students during the most stressful time of the year.

On March 1, 2012, the Metropolitan Museum of Art hosted An Oasis at the Met during exam week in order to encourage students to escape from their books, essays, and exams and celebrate the Museum's New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and Later South Asia (also known as NGAALICALSA).

The College Group at the Met, a group of 25 local college students, organized the event for undergraduate students, but also welcomed graduate students with a valid up-to-date student ID. Most attendees learned about the event via Facebook, and as soon as the event claimed

to have 3,058 attending students, I clicked the attending button as well, in anticipation of visiting the museum afterhours. The event soon found students begging for an invite, and the event was one worth begging for.

Upon entering the museum the night of the event, even though I consider myself a regular visitor at the Met, I was stunned by the museum's different atmosphere. Dimmed



Joanna Russ-Tashi

lights and candlelit-scattered tables were filled with throngs of students. While there were few newcomers to the museum's galleries, everyone was excited to explore the museum's newly renovated galleries, especially while munching on Middle-Eastern snacks like falafel and grape leaves. The College Group at the Met offered four free tours, in addition to

the free admission and snacks. I went on the first tour, led by the student curators who were knowledgeable but wrestled with the noise of the crowds.

A highlight of the tour was the Met's new courtyard. The Met has been renovating the

New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia since 2003. On November 1, 2011, the Met fully opened its galleries and showcased its new Medieval Islamic courtyard created by living Moroccan craftsmen. With tile patterns based on those in the Alhambra palace in Granada and carved cedar molding based on renowned woodwork of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Islamic school in Fez, the courtyard was just short of Moroccan people convening during their daily routines. In addition to the vivid detail in the design, this courtyard epitomizes an oasis that many students search for during periods of stress. The ambiance of the bright (artificial) light and the small bowl full of water and planted with lily pads allows students to stop going through the motions and enjoy the art around them.

After the tour, the museum began to bounce with avid dancing and chatting. Musical guests, Zikrayat and DJ Louie XIV pleased the crowds by playing both pop and contemporary music for the cultured crew. Being in the museum after hours seemed positively overwhelming, and

once everyone started dancing to the music I was skeptical about experiencing a rave at the Met, but the scene stayed tame, with students grooving in their best attire. Guests were encouraged to "dress to the nines in their best semi-formal attire or national dress," and I have to confess that the event was just as much about fashion as it was about art. Female students sported heels in gravity-defying heights and shapes, while the male students had so many hipster glasses and vintage SLR cameras, I lost count. The event ended and successfully provided the slow rhythm of walking through a gallery and the quick thrill of dancing afterhours at the Oasis at the Met. Surely, the Met will become a new stress-reliever for a plethora of anxiety-stricken students as soon as final exams begin.

The best news: The College Group at the Met have an event coming up on May 15 in conjunction with The Costume Institute's special exhibition Schiaparelli and Prada: Impossible Conversations. Stay tuned for another oasis.

# ARTS & CULTURE

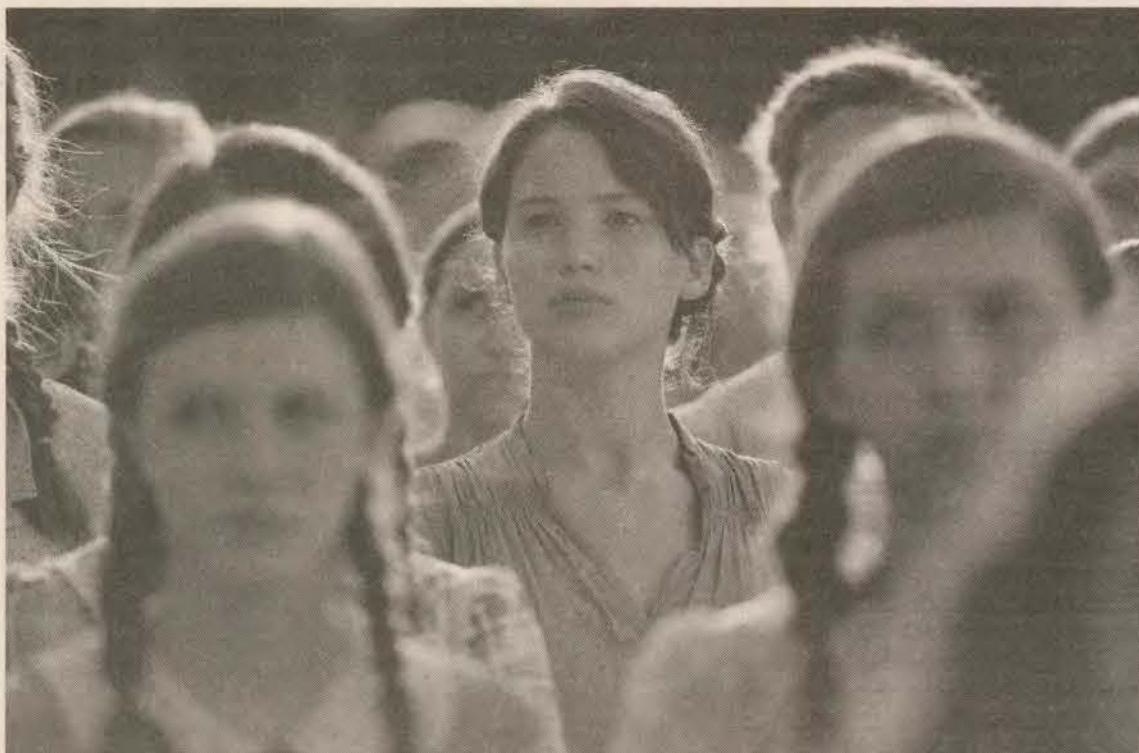
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## Hungry for a Good Movie?

**BY RACHEL TZIPKING** By Sunday night of the opening weekend of "The Hunger Games," I'd already seen the movie twice. The first viewing was a terrific midnight showing in conjunction with a charity action (to fight hunger, naturally) where my friend and I mingled with other die-hard fans, and even briefly wound up on the NBC Nightly News. Then, I was lucky enough to get on the list for "The Hunger Games" private viewing, a terrific and sold-out event sponsored by SCWSC, YSU, and YCSA. Though I was planning to attend both showings just for fun, seeing the movie twice allowed me to more fully appreciate its stunning visuals, complex and emotional plot, and many talented actors.

If you are looking for an exact replica of Suzanne Collins's bestselling book transferred to the big screen, don't get your hopes up. This movie is not the book's twin but its companion, its complement. While the book is written as a first-person narrative, letting the reader into the mind of the tough heroine, the movie expands beyond that limited perspective to the behind-the-scenes workings of the Capitol and its Gamemakers. The movie allows for a wider exploration into the dystopian world of "The Hunger Games."

The movie opens by briefly describing what the Hunger Games are: the 12 districts of Panem, in punishment for their rebellion 74 years ago, must each year send one boy and one girl to the Capitol to take part



No, She's not standing in the elevator.

Murray Close

in a grotesque tournament in which they must fight to the death until only one person, or Tribute, survives. Katniss Everdeen, played by Jennifer Lawrence, a teenage girl from the poor coal-mining District 12, volunteers as Tribute when her younger sister's name is called. Katniss, who secretly learned to hunt in order to feed her starving family after her father died, actually has many of the practical

survival skills that can help her win the Games. Recognizing this, a host of memorable characters, including her mentor, Haymitch (Woody Harrelson), her clothing designer, Cinna (Lenny Kravitz), and of course her fellow Tribute, Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), come together to strategize a victory for the underdog District 12, and hopefully strike a blow against the carefully planned Games.

One of the highlights of the movie was director Gary Ross's interpretation of the Capitol, a place of decadence and shallowness. The bright colors and inventive fashions contrast strongly with the drabness of the Districts, especially when the Capitol Representative to District 12, Effie Trinket (Elizabeth Banks) minces her way onscreen to choose the Tributes. Banks, along with the

outrageous television host Caesar Flickerman, expertly played by Stanley Tucci, somehow add just the right amount of humor to an otherwise grim plot.

While "The Hunger Games" has been a huge hit at the box office, one aspect of the movie that could use improvement is the computer graphics. In one dramatic scene, the flames of a forest fire are far from believable. Another key element, the genetically altered canine beasts, or "muttations," do not have the same personality which makes them so terrifying in the books. I was also very disappointed not to have seen a single mockingjay, the symbolic bird representing the Districts' growing resentment towards the affluent, complacent Capitol.

"The Hunger Games" is not only a terrific movie but also conveys an important message. One of the most moving scenes in my opinion was seeing Haymitch's disgust as a Capitol child celebrated the Hunger Games holiday by pretending to stab his sister with a toy sword as their parents looked on in adoration. To the Capitol citizens, the violence of the Arena is just a game, while to the Gamemakers and leaders, including the quietly terrifying President Snow (Donald Sutherland), the Games are a cleverly designed method of political control. In our own world, where political unrest is a daily occurrence, "The Hunger Games" reminds us of the terrible results that total control can wreak.

## Biblical Beauty: Ancient Secrets and Modern Solutions

By Rachelle Weisberger

**REVIEWED BY ALIYAH RIVKA GUTTMANN** I have always had a fascination with the women in Jewish history. I feel as though their lessons, traits, and values transcend time, especially in the way that we carry on their presence with our own names. For instance, Rivka is my middle name, and I was not just named after my great-great grandmother, but also after one of our foremothers. Since I never knew very much about my great-great grandmother, I would read about our foremother's life in the Bible and see how those passages applied to me. I have convinced myself that I am like her (and that if we ever met we would be friends). So when I first read *Biblical Beauty: Ancient Secrets and Modern Solutions* by Rachelle Weisberger, I was instantly intrigued to find more connections with the matriarchs.

I was surprised to learn about a book full of information about women and beauty, even though I am a fairly knowledgeable woman in the studies of *Tanach*. Weisberger explores every source of Judaic teachings; the entire *Tanach*, the *Talmud*, *Midrashim*, *Apocrypha*, and even the *Zohar*. I expected to read about the presence of beauty in *Megillat Esther* and *Megillat Ruth*, obviously. But, text and information about beauty in the *Gemara* and the *Zohar*? This was news to me, and I had to read on.

The first part of the book, titled *Outer Beauty*, informatively explains skin care, sun care, makeup, hair care, fragrance, jewelry, and healthy aging. Each of these sections contain "Ancient Secrets" which tell its Biblical origin, then the following chapter discusses its "Modern Solutions." The "Ancient Secrets" are interesting explorations in the history of each specific subject while the "Modern Solutions" chapters are informative about the fundamental ideas about the subject. In addition to the ancient and modern thoughts, Weisberger shares her professional advice. For instance in the "Ancient Secrets: Rahab" Weisberger explores the makeup regimen she may have used to enhance her beauty, as the Sages tell us she is "among the four

most beautiful women who ever lived, along with Sarah, Abigail and Esther."

Weisberger captures the reader's attention by explaining that the *pukh* the Bible mentions Rahab used was likely an Arabic substance called kohl, used often by Egyptians creating a "cat eye" look, a look we all strive to perfect even today. She then explains in the "Modern Solutions" section, "Even though eyeliner and pencils are frequently labeled "kohl," they bear no resemblance to traditional kohl formulas that are still used in much of the world. Because it present a lead risk, kohl is illegal in the United States."

Although she does give a great facial chart in the makeup chapter, I had hoped for more images throughout. For instance, when explaining some of the archeological findings of jewelry or the painting depictions of the women, she could have included specific photographs of the jewelry she mentions in order to have the subject further resonate with the reader and brighten the text. She writes that Judith's hair style, specifically, has been depicted in many ways by various artists like Gustav Klimt who depicted her with a bob, "styling her hair elaborately with every strand perfectly in place, just like her plan." But no visual accompanies this description.

Despite this visual lacks, Weisberger explores the history of hair styling originated by the Assyrians

around 1500 BCE. She explains how the Talmud describes how, "God adorned her [Eve] before presenting her to Adam," by braiding her hair. In the "Modern Solutions" Weisberger applies how we too use our hair as fashion statements as well as a tool to achieve goals and, dare I say, to allure men. She advises that, "essential omega-3 fatty acids found in salmon, mackerel, sardines, herring and lake trout have a direct impact on the condition of scalp and hair." Throughout the first section of the book it is full of tidbits, steps in make up, and routines to maintain glowing, youthful skin, hair, nails, and much more.

The second part of the book, titled *Inner Beauty*, details each of the matriarchs' struggle and our modern struggles as women. It consists of "Choices in Motherhood" and "Feminine Leadership." As a woman studying at SCW and having just finished midterms, my mind immediately debates with Weisberger's tales. She does cite textual passages but weaves together Midrash, Talmud, and Kaballah without always differentiating between the sources, which is misleading. For instance Weisberger writes that, "after the birth of her natural son, Isaac, Sarah ...demanded Abraham make Isaac his sole heir, and not Ishmael, who had become an idol worshipper like his mother." I'm not exactly sure where she got this idea from but from what I just learned in my Biblical Narrative course, taught by

Mrs. Gross, there is no textual proof in this situation that Ishmael became an idol worshipper. Rather, it says in Genesis 21:9 "And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne unto Abraham, making sport." I happen to know that there is a *midrash* that explains that perhaps Sarah saw Ishmael acting like an idol worshipper so because of this she knew he needed to leave but Weisberger fails to distinguish this. Whatever its flaws, this section stood out as extremely essential because it gave the reader a more dynamic understanding of beauty, rather than just focusing on surface beauty in an anti-feministic way.

Weisberger discusses the struggle between Rachel and Leah, as many of our matriarchs suffered from severe infertility. Because Rachel could not bear children but had the love and devotion of their husband Jacob, Leah was blessed with fertility. Rachel then decided to give her maid Bilhah to Jacob as a surrogate and treated the sons born from her as her own. Weisberger draws upon this in the "Modern Solutions" when examining the many ways women can deal with issues of infertility today, whether through IVF treatment, adoption, or as our foremothers did, surrogacy. Weisberger gives factual information on fertility, working mothers, higher education and business executives; the inspiration from the women in the Bible becomes clear.

*Biblical Beauty: Ancient Secrets and Modern Solutions* is a very interesting expedition of the women we have all learned about at the Shabbat table or in our classrooms. It informs the reader about historical facts and paints a picture of the lives of the matriarchs. Weisberger connects the professional and authentic material to our own lives. I would recommend it to any woman in my life; particularly it would make a great gift to any woman. Weisberger has done what I have always loved about the matriarchs - connecting their lives with the every day modern life of my own as woman, and because of that I enjoyed it and plan on wearing my name proudly.



## Pesach Word Search

**BY DAVIDA KOLLMAR** Before and even during Pesach time, it seems that on we're always looking for things. Whether it's combing the house for Chametz, looking for the Afikoman, or just trying to find the perfect Yom Tov dress, we're always searching for something. In honor of the Pesach search, here is a word search with 50 Pesach-related words. Enjoy, and hope you had a Chag Kasher VeSameach!

J	C	C	H	A	R	O	S	E	T	E	N	I	W	H
A	E	G	A	H	E	C	L	E	A	N	I	N	G	S
A	S	R	L	E	D	O	A	P	H	A	R	A	O	H
H	I	O	U	N	S	U	V	I	T	S	A	O	R	A
S	R	R	E	S	E	C	E	L	F	R	O	G	M	Z
A	D	A	G	G	A	H	R	L	E	L	P	M	E	T
L	A	M	B	S	E	L	Y	O	D	O	R	O	T	A
E	Y	R	H	E	B	R	E	W	M	O	A	I	L	M
A	S	E	A	F	I	K	O	M	A	N	O	O	C	C
R	H	W	L	I	B	E	D	I	K	A	H	L	A	H
N	R	S	L	R	E	D	E	S	K	C	I	R	B	A
R	O	N	E	A	L	R	E	V	O	S	S	A	P	O
A	O	A	L	H	I	D	E	S	T	P	Y	G	E	R
E	D	E	A	D	A	Y	E	N	U	N	E	M	L	E
T	H	G	I	N	D	I	M	C	H	A	M	E	T	Z

- |          |        |           |          |         |
|----------|--------|-----------|----------|---------|
| AFIKOMAN | COUCH  | HAGGADA   | MATZAH   | ROAST   |
| ANSWER   | CUPS   | HALLEL    | MENU     | SEDER   |
| BEDIKAH  | DAYENU | HEBREW    | MIDNIGHT | SEFIRAH |
| BLOOD    | DAYS   | HIDES     | MOSHE    | SLAVERY |
| BREAD    | DEAD   | JERUSALEM | PASSOVER | SNEH    |
| BRICK    | DOOR   | LAMB      | PHARAOH  | TEAR    |
| CHAMETZ  | DOROT  | LASH      | PILLOW   | TEMPLE  |
| CHAROSET | EGYPT  | LEARN     | RED SEA  | TEN     |
| CHOL     | FROG   | MAKKOT    | RICH     | WINE    |
| CLEANING | GEULAH | MAROR     | RISE     | ZEROAH  |

## Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of my Hasidic Roots

**REVIEW BY MIRIAM HERMAN** The New York Post had a field day with this one - to say the least. This past February, Deborah Feldman released her memoir. Now, Deborah Feldman sounds like a nice Jewish name for a nice Jewish girl. Well, in her case "nice" and "Jewish" do not quite do it justice.

Feldman's memoir depicts her experiences within and eventual rebellion against the Satmar sect of Judaism. She describes growing up in her grand-parents' home. She was unable to live with her parents for her father is an embarrassing mentally disabled man and her mother fled Williamsburg to live in a secular lifestyle. Most of the book Feldman chronicles her abused and terrible childhood and married life, informing the reader of many personal and unnecessary details. However, since the entire book is awash with contradictions, it becomes very difficult for a close reader to take Feldman's claims seriously.

In the introduction Feldman declares that "Chaya took control of me... she decided that I would live with my grandparents." Yet, in the first chapter, merely fifteen pages later, Deborah writes, "I was very unhappy living at my Aunt Chaya's...

I begged to come live with Bubby." Within the introduction and first chapter there are three more times when she contradicts herself, saying at first things like, "I am convinced that my ability to feel deeply is what makes me extraordinary" while immediately opposite this, on the next page, writing "to think what I can do with [this skill]... to convince others of emotions I don't really feel!" She admits to not being truthful, to her greatest strength being her ability to deceive and this, in my eyes, removes some of her credibility and forces me to read the harrowing accounts of her life with a disbelieving eye.

As a modern Orthodox reader, I despised that Feldman desecrates many of the most holy of Jewish customs and laws. When she learns the laws of family purity she feels "betrayed by all the women in... [her] life... [for by performing the laws they are] agreeing that... [they] are dirty because ...[they] are a woman." She describes going to synagogue on Simchat Torah to see the Satmar Rebbe dance, "how senseless it seems...my friends contort their limbs...how utterly ridiculous to expend so much effort for a...view of an old man swaying back and forth with a scroll."

As well it was horrifying to read her account of a story that she heard from her husband who heard from someone else about a man who murdered his son for sinning. Writing such terrible things, which have been proven as false, as chronologed in the Jewish Week, only gives ammunition to those who already hate us.

Even worse, the people that knew nothing of Judaism until they opened

this book, for them none of its beauty is depicted.

The last chapter of her book, after she has left Williamsburg with her son, is where I find positivity as a modern Orthodox reader. She describes a relationship with God that is what we all aim for, where "God is no longer a prescription for paradise but an ally in...[her] heart." She declares, "I am proud of being Jewish, because I think that's where my indomitable spirit comes from."

It is admirable that Deborah was able to break free of a society as tight as hers to follow her American Dream, and to provide for her son the life she wishes she could have had. However the constant attacks against all of Judaism and her constant contradictions ruin the book for a modern Orthodox reader.

## Computer Vision Syndrome

**BY BRACHA ROBINSON** You have, probably, at some point, noticed someone who is staring intently at their computer screen. They are hunched forward with their shoulders up, and all you can think is, "that can't possibly be comfortable."

And you have, probably, all had the experience, after spending many hours in front of the computer, where you say, "I just can't spend any another minute in front of a computer screen." Perhaps you are even thinking about this right now.

Dr. Mark Rosenfield, a Doctor of Optometry, spoke about the adverse effects of sitting in front of a computer for too long. On February 27, he gave an eye-opening lecture with the Pre-Optometry Club about Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) - a new phenomenon where people feel discomfort from being in front of a screen for too long. (How ironic that I am typing this article on my laptop...)

Because we are in the Digital Age, people of all ages find themselves in front of a screen for large portions of the day. Surveys show that American children ages 8-18 sit in front of a screen (TV or computer) for an average of 7.5 hours a day - meaning that many children spend much more time than 7.5 hours in front of the screen. Even more disturbing are the toddlers that addicted to iPads or are glued to the television. And adults are not immune from this either—the vast majority of Americans require computers for their jobs, and students (like me) frequently take notes on laptops. Rosenfield noticed that many people find it uncomfortable to look at a screen and these people are generally unhappy, so he ventured to find out why.

There are a few things that make computers different from other things that have text (like books and newspapers). Most importantly, the screens are usually very close to our faces. Either we are holding a smartphone about three inches away from our face, or we are hunched forward in front of a laptop. The constant need to refocus to different distances brings the eyes a lot of strain and forces our eyes to work harder. This is exacerbated by the text sizes, many of which are smaller than newspapers and books, requiring us to shorten the distance between our eyes and the computer so that we can actually read the webpage. Furthermore, the arched positions that many people sit in while using the computer causes physical discomfort in addition to visual strain. Fortunately, there is no evidence that screens cause eye damage (phew!), but the discomfort is not something that should be overlooked. Other symptoms include: tired eyes, dry eyes, irritated/burning eyes, and light sensitivity.

Rosenfield conducted an experiment to test the prevalence of CVS in adults. He surveyed a number of offices in the Bryant Park area, and found that workers spent time in front of a computer for an average of six hours a day with a range of half an hour to 16 hours a day. That's right - some people spend 16 hours a day on the computer

(my jaw dropped too). He asked them if any of them experienced CVS symptoms and for what percentage of the time. He found that 4 in 10 people experienced symptoms at least half the time - and for someone who sits in front of a computer for, say, eight hours a day, half of the time is a lot of time to feel discomfort! Rosenfield's study also found that symptoms are worse with older age, time spent on the computer, and women.

Some of you nay-sayers might say that the eye strain does not come from the screen, but rather from external factors, such as the closeness of the screen to one's face. Rosenfield was one step ahead of you—he conducted a study where people had to perform a reading task both from a screen and from a piece of paper (while ensuring that all other factors remained constant) and found that people found more discomfort reading from the screen than from the paper. Furthermore, studies show that people express CVS symptoms from Kindles, which are meant to mimic books as much as possible. In essence, there is just something about a computer screen that affects your vision in a negative way.

CVS can be caused by a number of different factors. People who have difficulty focusing, a bad prescription, or dry eyes are more prone to CVS. Moreover, non-ocular conditions such as lighting and posture also play a role. This can be treated by fixing one's prescription—perhaps by correcting small errors, getting bifocals, or getting glasses specifically for the computer. However, this does not address the issue of Dry Eye Syndrome.

Dry Eye Syndrome, something that affects many middle-aged women (including some who attend Stern College!), is a syndrome where the eyes do not produce enough tears. People with Dry Eye tend to feel more discomfort in front of a computer because the cornea is more exposed, so more tears evaporate. One of the main reasons why computers exacerbate this syndrome is because of its adverse effects on blinking. We blink in order to spread the tears around the surface of our eyes, and sometimes the computer screen can affect the number of blinks and the quality of blinks: people tend to blink less and to blink less completely (their eyelids do not completely cover the surface of the eye) when on the computer. Those with Dry Eye can experience relief by making their environment friendlier (better lighting, for instance), and by taking breaks. It is very important that CVS symptoms are addressed because visual discomfort affects productivity.

Rosenfield gave an eye-opening lecture with eye-popping statistics regarding those with eye discomfort. Batsheva Kuhr, a pre-optometry student, noted that "the presentation was very dynamic," and she expressed surprise that CVS was "so prevalent." For now, researchers can only give advice as to how to alleviate symptoms, but hopefully they will find a permanent cure for CVS.

# SCIENCE & HEALTH

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## Peril at the Pool: The Genotoxic Risks of Being a Lifeguard

**BY SAMANTHA SELESNY** When temperatures rise, many seek relief in going for a swim, secure in the knowledge that lifeguards are thereto protect them and bring safety to the pool or lakeside. However, these guardians are at great risk themselves. There are numerous dangers to being a lifeguard. Many of these risks are genotoxic, that is, they have a deleterious effect on the genetic material of a cell. The most prominent genotoxic effects are caused by long hours in the sun and hazardous by-products of both pools and lakes.

One of the major genotoxic risks to lifeguards is constant exposure to UV radiation from sunlight. The danger of UV light is that, because of its high energy, it can ionize molecules (converting them to ions by removing or adding charged particles) and thus induce chemical reactions in the skin, which can cause many harmful effects in the body. Approximately 90% of UVB and nearly all of UVC rays are absorbed by the ozone layer in the earth's atmosphere. UVA makes up 95% of UV radiation that reaches the earth. When UV radiation reaches the skin, its ionizing energy is absorbed by a variety of molecules including a cell's DNA. Over time, the absorption of ionizing radiation by a cell's DNA can result in accumulation of genetic mutations, eventually transforming the cell to a cancerous one. While UVA penetrates more deeply into the dermis and damages both the epidermis and dermis, UVB has biological effects 1,000 times stronger than UVA.

Phototoxicity is another issue faced when dealing with UV radiation. Chemical photosensitivity refers to an adverse reaction in the skin that results when certain

chemicals or drugs are applied at the same time that a person is exposed to UV radiation. Phototoxicity is a form of chemical photosensitivity and phototoxic agents are activated in the UVA range. Consequences of exposure to a photosensitizing agent can range from uncomfortable, serious, or life-threatening.

Aware of the harmful effects of sunlight, many pool-goers will apply sunscreen and then spend hours in the sun, thinking that they are fully protected. Unfortunately, sunscreen may not fully protect the skin as well as one might think. Sun Protection Factor, or SPF is the most common way to determine the effectiveness of a sunscreen. This level reflects protection against erythema, skin redness caused by swelling of the capillaries. SPF quantifies the protection that a product can offer in terms of exposure time in relation to sunburn when compared to unprotected exposure. For example if sunscreen has SPF 30, a sun exposure 30 times greater is necessary to produce erythema. However, the dosage to be applied, maintained by the FDA (about one ounce for an average adult), is shown to be far more than what the average person applies.

Another danger lifeguards are exposed to is the detrimental effects of chlorine. Chlorine is used in pools to disinfect them. However, chlorine reacts with organic and nitrogen compounds like hair, sweat, lotion, and saliva to form chlorination by-products (CBPs). Some of these CBP's can be transferred from water to air. Several studies have found an association between exposure to

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## A Wave of Sleepiness: The True Facts about Narcolepsy

**BY DINA GOLFEIZ** Day in and day out, many college students find it difficult to get out of bed. Glancing around classrooms, it is clear that most could use a few extra hours of shut-eye. However, how many find it difficult to stay awake more than an hour or two or fall asleep in the middle of a conversation? Hopefully, none of you answered this question with "I do."

WebMD defines narcolepsy as "a neurological disorder that affects the control of sleep and wakefulness." For those with normal sleep cycles, sleep occurs in stages, each becoming deeper and deeper until REM, or rapid eye movement, sleep is reached. We are also able to control, to a degree, when to wake up and when to sleep. However, narcoleptics do not have this ability. Narcoleptics have no control

over their sleep and wakefulness, dropping into and waking up from a sound sleep with no warning. Narcoleptics also do not have regular sleep cycles, and REM sleep is reached almost immediately after falling asleep.

So then what's the big issue? As it turns out, even though narcoleptics wake up feeling refreshed, this feeling doesn't last for long, only for an hour or two. The very fact that they go into REM sleep so quickly can help explain many of the symptoms of narcolepsy, which include vivid hallucinations which are indistinguishable from reality, cataplexy, or the sudden loss of muscle tone, and most importantly, excessive daytime sleepiness.

When one experiences cataplexy, his head suddenly falls forward, his jaw slackens, and his knees

buckle causing him to collapse. This symptom, along with narcolepsy itself, is usually triggered by intense emotion, such as surprise, anger, or happiness. Imagine collapsing and falling asleep every time you started laughing. These sleep attacks may be funny when you're watching them on a YouTube video, but not so much if the narcoleptic is crossing the street or driving a car. This is what keeps many narcoleptics from enjoying the things most of us take for granted, like having fun with friends in the pool, driving, or even crossing the street on their own.

The most basic sign of narcolepsy, however, is Excessive Daytime Sleepiness, also called EDS. Even if the narcoleptic slept for 12 hours the night before, EDS will still interfere

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## The Genotoxic Risks of Being a Lifeguard

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elevated Trihalomethanes, (THMs), which are common CBPs, and adverse health effects including irritations of the eyes, skin, nose and throat, as well as adverse reproductive effects. In order to try and resolve this issue recent studies have also showed decreasing pH of the pool reduced the formation of THMs. Unfortunately, this may not be an entirely practical solution, as the pH for a pool has to be maintained at a certain level in order to maintain a safe environment for swimmers.

Furthermore, in a recent study, commercially available sunscreen product was exposed to chlorine, a common disinfectant in pools. The results showed that active ingredients in some sunscreens can react with chlorinating agents, generating new species that are toxic to cells.

Swimming in a lake, rather than in a pool, comes with its own health risks. One is harmful algal blooms (HAB). These blooms are harmful and they create public health risks for

swimmers by producing very potent toxins, which include neurotoxins, hepatotoxins (chemicals that cause damage to the liver), and carcinogens. Efforts to develop technology that will be able to determine when a harmful HAB event has occurred is underway (Trainer 2008). In addition to HAB there are other threats associated with coastal waters, including pathogens such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites associated with fecal contamination of water. There are also naturally occurring water-borne chemical toxicants and pathogens that can adversely affect people who use the water such as arsenic (a heavy metal) and vibrios (bacterial pathogens).

Although they are there to protect others, lifeguards face many dangers in their seasonal occupation. There are always emerging studies showing new developments in how to prevent these harmful effects. This new data will continue to improve and make this notable profession a safer one.

## The True Facts about Narcolepsy

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with everyday functions. People with EDS generally have little or no energy and concentration, depressed feelings, memory lapses, and extreme exhaustion on a daily basis.

You might be wondering what causes narcolepsy; however, this still baffles scientists as the exact cause has yet to be discovered. PubMed Health does, however, list several possible causes. Sometimes narcolepsy is due to a decreased amount of hypocretin, which is a protein found in the brain. But doctors don't really know what causes less of this protein so they don't know how to counteract this. Others suggest that narcolepsy might be an autoimmune disorder, which means the body's immune system attacks itself.

The symptoms of narcolepsy usually first start occurring in people between the ages of 15 and 30. Narcolepsy is a chronic condition, meaning once you have the disorder, you're stuck with it for life. Narcolepsy occurs in about 1/2000 people, yet most cases go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed for an average of 10 years.

The reason for this is that it is difficult to diagnose narcolepsy since there are a lot of sleep disorders that can have similar symptoms, like insomnia and sleep apnea. And sometimes, because of the hallucinations, narcolepsy is first diagnosed as a psychiatric disease,

such as schizophrenia. A physical exam and blood tests can help rule out any other diseases. Afterwards, two sleep tests are performed. The first, the Multiple Sleep Latency Test, is performed to see how long it takes you to fall asleep during the day. Since narcoleptics fall asleep much quicker than a normal person, this test is very effective. The second test, the polysomnogram, is performed overnight while the patient is sleeping to check for abnormalities in the sleep cycle. If REM sleep occurs at unusual times in the sleep cycle, other sleep conditions can be eliminated.

The problem is even if one is diagnosed, there is still no known cure for narcolepsy, only methods that can help control its symptoms and reduce the number of sleep attacks, such as taking naps during the day. This is most effective when it is done after meals since food usually makes people happy and can induce these sudden attacks. There are even some prescription drugs that act as stimulants that can keep one awake, like armodafinil or Ritalin.

I'm sure many of you no longer take your sleep for granted. You know that your sleepiness is due to your terrible sleep habits. This can be repaired. However, if you or someone you know regularly falls asleep in the middle of a laugh, perhaps it is time to make that dreaded doctor's visit.

## Nutrition Nook: Summer Lovin'

**BY YELLE LASSON** The November 2011 "Nutrition Nook" advised as how to combat the winter blues with a nutritious diet, and now the changing weather brings along new challenges. Summer break does not mean that you need to break the healthy eating habits you acquired throughout the year. While boots are replaced by sandals and ice rinks by swimming pools, we replace our eating habits to reflect our change in activity as well. Though summer may represent a warm, care-free attitude, keeping a few tips can provide a happy, healthy, and nutritious season.

Ah...those long summer-sizzling days while Dad flips burgers at the ol' BBQ. Summer is bookended by the two of the biggest barbeque days of the year, Labor Day and Memorial Day, with July 4<sup>th</sup> in the middle. Picnics and barbeques can be a fantastic way to achieve a balanced meal, if you choose your options wisely. Next time you are at a BBQ, consider these tips:

Rather than go straight for the red meat, a great source of protein can be found in leaner meats such as turkey burgers and grilled chicken. For added benefits, you can enjoy them sandwiched between a whole wheat bun and fresh vegetables, instead of white bread and calorie-loaded sauces.

Skip the potato chips and throw some vegetables on the grill; zucchinis,

sweet potatoes, onions, and peppers are a great addition that will satisfy your snack craving.

Avoid dousing your fresh vegetable salad in bottled dressing and opt for olive oil and lemon juice.

What's a better way to cool down on a warm afternoon than with a trip to the ice cream store? Well...think again. While the "calcium excuse" for ice cream is the oldest in the book, the added sugar-intake and artificial flavoring of these pleasures can slow you down at times when you want to be most active; unfortunately, Slurpees are not a nutritious option either.

Thankfully, there are some convincing alternatives to your favorite cool treat! Fruit smoothies are just as chilly and (naturally) sweet and will provide added nutrients and vitamins straight from your kitchen! Just throw any frozen berries, mango, or peaches in the blender with your favorite juice for a whirlin' drink. Add plain vanilla, non-fat yogurt for some real calcium and a creamier option. Try to steer away from iced coffees and cold sodas as well; the high caffeine content will dehydrate you when you need water the most.

So many fantastic fruits are in season in the summer – sliced citrus fruits, strawberries, watermelon, peaches, kiwis, and pineapple are cool and crisp and a great snack that will keep you full for longer. In particular,

watermelon is rich in vitamin C, beta carotene, and lycopene, and is also 92% water, to keep you hydrated throughout the day.

You may remember late night snack parties in your bunk house or s'mores around the campfire from when you were a kid. But beware, even camp counselors and staff can fall prey to late-night eating. Be conscious of what you intake at what hour, because midnight eating does not allow your body to digest fully and will make you sluggish in the morning. Not great for someone who has to get up and go, go, go!

Summer provides some fantastic opportunities for healthy eating and activity. Take advantage of the outdoors and summer weather by grabbing a friend and walking, running, swimming, or any of your other favorite sports. Obviously, do not forget your bottle of H<sub>2</sub>O and lather up with the appropriate sun-protection.

Wishing you a happy and healthy summer!

*The SCW Nutrition Club wishes the best of luck to our outgoing President Sarah Edinger who will be a graduate student at NYU Steinhardt Nutrition Program next year. Thanks for making the SCWNC what it is today! Look out for SCWNC '13 for more nutritious initiatives!*

## The Causes of Crying

**BY NAAMAH PLOTZKER** Golda Meir once said, "Those who do not know how to weep with their whole heart do not know how to laugh either." But you probably have been in situations where you have found yourself weeping bitterly, except without your whole heart, if you have ever chopped an onion.

As it happens, there are three motivations to lacrimate, or, to shed tears, which results in the production of three different types of tears: basal tears, reflex tears, and emotional, or psychic tears. Basal tears coat the eye on a constant basis, lubricating it, protecting it from infections, and feeding it nutrients that it needs. The salt concentration of basal tears is similar to that of blood plasma, and they also contain enzymes and immune proteins. Reflex tears have a different composition than basal tears, and are shed in response to exposure to irritants in order to wash them out of the eye. A classic example of reflex tears is the heavy and uncontrollable crying while chopping onions. Both basal and reflex tears serve fairly straightforward physiological and evolutionary functions – other animals definitely shed these two types of tears, indicating that eyes require these two goals be met. However, lacrimating in response to deep emotion appears to be a somewhat random response. There must be some goal, psychological, biochemical, or evolutionary, that humans fulfill by an observable eye-washing.

Dr. Stephen Sideroff, a licensed clinical psychologist, consultant and

assistant professor of psychiatry at UCLA, and a clinical director of the Moonview Treatment Center in Santa Monica, California, explains crying in psychological terms. "It's a release," he explains, a way of relieving the "buildup of energy with feelings." But on a deeper level, it needs to be asked, of all the possible ways to relieve emotional energy, why this? Why crying?

The biochemical theory explains the phenomenon further. Most people tend to feel better after a good cry. This may be because psychic tears are qualitatively different than basal or reflex tears, containing more protein-based hormones such as prolactin, as well as more manganese. The release of these two substances balances stress levels and releases chemical buildup in the body. This sudden release may explain why people feel a sense of relief, as if a burden has been lifted, after crying.

The most popular theories about crying, however, relate to its evolutionary effects. Dr. Robert Provine, a neuroscientist at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, calls the evolution of psychic tears "a breakthrough in the evolution of humans as a social species." He proposes that there is something called the "tear effect," which he studied by asking a group of 80 undergraduates for their interpretations of the emotion in photographs of people crying. Some photos were original, showing a face flooded with tears, while other photos had the tears digitally removed. While the tear-filled photos were

interpreted both as being more sad as well as unequivocally sad, less sadness and even other emotions, such as puzzlement or awe were ascribed to the tearless photos. Consequently, Dr. Provine that tears may have evolved to strengthen the expression of emotion.

Other scientists point to the "secondary gain" of crying. Crying can signal not only emotion itself, but can be a signal for attention or to win sympathy, support, and comfort from onlookers, possibly even to manipulate them. Imagine back in the history of humans, or even nowadays in places where food is tragically scarce, and there is a person crying from starvation. Other members of the community may tend to relegate the food to the crier because he seems to need it most. In this way too, the signaling of emotions has an evolutionary advantage. On the other hand, other research indicates that it is if not impossible, it is extremely difficult to cry fake tears.

Personal experience can demonstrate that some people cry more easily than others. Get a group of friends get together to watch a "tear-jerker," and it is quite likely that while some people will be bawling hysterically, others in the group will appear stoic. Why some people cry more easily than others is still a mystery, although some correlations are found to sex, personality, and experience of personal trauma or tragedy.

## Dogs' Double Duty: Animal Assisted Therapy

**BY SHULAMIT BRUNSWICK** On Tuesdays, Doc's coat gets an extra brush and he chews an extra breath freshener before he heads off to work. When he comes into the office to sign in, everyone is happy to see him. His easy-going manner and big smile make him an ideal addition to the hospital setting and his presence has helped alleviate the pain, fear, and loneliness of a hospital stay for many people. Doc is a therapy dog.

Doc is a Labrador Retriever who is part of the Scripps Therapy dog program in San Diego. He makes the rounds, just like the human volunteers; going into pre-approved rooms and offering comfort to the patients and making their stay a little easier. Animal-assisted therapy has emerged to help people, especially patients in hospitals, relax and heal, and the benefits they experience may be physiological as well as emotional.

Humans have always interacted with animals and used them in labor-intensive tasks, and the discovery that animals could be used in the healing process occurred much earlier than one might think. Animal assisted therapy (AAT) goes as far back as the 9th century in Belgium, where disabled people could learn to care for farm animals. In 1792, the Quaker-founded York Retreat in England used caring for animals as a therapy for the insane. Even Florence Nightingale in her *Notes on Nursing* recommends "a small pet animal" as an "excellent companion for the sick."

It was first medically proven that animals could be used as part of a successful therapy program and be medically beneficial at the Oakwood Forensic Center, an institution for the criminally insane. In 1975 a patient in the ward for the most depressed and non-communicative patients found a hurt sparrow in the yard and

smuggled the bird into the building. The patients adopted the bird and caught insects to feed it. For the first time, the inmates began acting like a group and related well to the staff. When the staff realized animals could be effective therapy, the hospital proposed a study to evaluate the benefits. The hospital conducted a year-long comparison study between two identical wards, one with pets and one without. The patients on the ward with the pets required half the amount of medication, had reduced violence, and made no suicide attempts. The other ward had eight suicides attempted during that period. Animals have been gradually making their way into therapy programs ever since.

While the emotional benefits of AAT were clear, the physiological benefits were not. Several studies have been conducted to see if patients can actually experience physiological benefits from interacting with a therapy dog. In my research, two studies stuck out.

The first study, done by Sandra B. Barker, et al., focused simply on the stress-relieving benefits of a therapy dog. The responses of adult dog owners interacting with their own dog or an unfamiliar therapy dog under similar conditions were examined. The study attempted to answer if the physiological response is similar when people encounter their own dog as opposed to an unfamiliar therapy dog.

To measure stress reduction, the participants first relaxed for 30 minutes in a comfortable chair, then were administered a stress task in the form of the Stroop Color Word Test. They were shown a succession of names of colors that were inked in a conflicting color. For example, they might be shown the word "red" printed in green ink. They participant must then correctly name the color printed. The participants then interacted with a dog, according to what group

they were in, for 30 minutes, and then watched a 60-minute neutral video.

The results showed that there was only a mild stress response to the stress test and had little consequences on the physiological signs that were being measured. However, the changes there were observed, particularly with heart rate and blood pressure, seem to indicate trend of relaxation when the participant interacted with the dog, whether their own or the unfamiliar dog. It seems that a therapy dog can be used as a stress reducer. But what about a hospital setting, where the environment is far more stressful than taking a Color Test?

Another study, conducted by Chia-Chun Tsai et al., explored the stress-reducing effect of dogs on hospitalized children. Hospitalization leads to high levels of anxiety and fear in children and this stress can lead to health problems later in life. While it is well known that AAT can bring comfort, few studies have measured the physiological effect of AAT on children. The experiment measured the heart rate and blood pressure of a sample of 15 hospitalized children, aged 7-17, during a session of AAT and a session of puzzle building with a research assistant. The Child Medical Fear Scale was used for the children to self report their levels of medical fear and the State Anxiety scale of the State Anxiety Inventory for Children was used to self report anxiety. The sessions took place at the same time of day on two consecutive days.

The researchers found that the systolic blood pressure of the children decreased from pre- to post- AAT visits and remained decreased after the session was over, indicating that the effects of AAT last beyond the session itself. Systolic blood pressure did decrease during the puzzle session, but rose back up to pre-session levels within a few minutes after the session

ended. Diastolic blood pressure decreased after AAT visits but remained elevated and did not decrease after a puzzle session.

No child reported high levels of anxiety after either the AAT or the puzzle session. On the Child Medical Fear Scale, five children indicated great fear after AAT and four reported great fear after a puzzle session. There was no significant difference in anxiety levels comparing after AAT and after the puzzle session. However, the presence of fear is explainable because the fear of medical procedures is to be expected as the children still have the stressor of an unfamiliar medical procedure looming. General anxiety decreased, but actual fear of medical procedures did not as this is seen as a threat. The AAT was found able to calm general anxiety.

Both these studies demonstrate that AAT is an effective way to relieve both everyday stress and stress caused by hospitalization. Measuring physiological changes as well as an important part of the experiment because self-reports do not indicate a difference between the effects of AAT and puzzle-building. Getting the physiological data reduces the observer bias and the courtesy bias, so the researchers obtain a more accurate picture of the effect AAT has on people. Both these studies indicate that, aside from emotional comfort, AAT helps reduce blood pressure and other signs of stress.

From beasts of burden and guard dogs, animals have found their way into our home and our hearts. The effect "man's best friend" has on its owner is unmistakable and this effect can be translated to a stress relief program, even a hospital setting. As it turns out, coming into contact with a dog does not just make you feel better, it actually has a positive effect on one's health.

## It's a Dog Eat Dog World

**BY SHULAMIT BRUNSWICK** Pop quiz: Which bite will most likely cause serious infection if it breaks the skin? A. A bite from your little sister or B. A bite from a healthy (non-rabies infected) dog?

One of the most common old wives' tales is "A dog's mouth is cleaner than a human's mouth." This is said despite the fact that dogs spend most of their time licking and eating suspicious objects. How can this be? Do dogs have fewer naturally-occurring microbes in their saliva than humans? Or, does one of those microbes have an antiseptic property that works to kill any microbes the dog ingests? Or, indeed, is this just an old wives' tale that does not hold a grain of truth?

Perhaps the old wives observed that a dog's wound tends to heal faster when the dog licks it. However, the expression would then be an incorrect interpretation – the dog's lick most likely heals because it removes dead tissue, not because it sterilizes the wound.

By "cleaner," does the expression mean "contains less bacteria?" The human mouth contains more than 100 bacterial cells adhering to each cell of the tongue, 10-20 bacterial cells adhering to each cheek epithelial cell, and 100 million in every milliliter of saliva. As of August 2002, scientists at the Forsyth Institute have found more than 615 different species of bacteria

living in the human mouth.

The mouth is an ideal place for bacteria to grow and thrive: it is a constant 35°C, an excellent climate for mesophiles (bacteria that grow best in warm temperatures), has a large surface area to cling to, and contains a steady consumption of carbohydrates and sugars to feed the bacteria. Bacteria enjoy similar conditions in a dog's mouth where the temperature is 38°C, so dogs' mouths are hardly cleaner.

Or perhaps by "cleaner" the expression means "contains less harmful bacteria?" This suggestion does not really work either, as most bacteria are species-specific and bacteria that are harmful to dogs are not harmful to humans.

However, the fact that bacteria are mostly species-specific has implications on the correct answer to our quiz. While a dog bite by a rabid dog may transmit rabies, a dog that is rabies-free will deliver a less harmful bite than a human bite. The bacteria in the human mouth are adapted to living inside their human hosts and thus have a greater potential to cause infection in a human than dog bacteria, which may not be able to survive in the human host.

After dogs and cats, human bites are believed to be the third most common bite wounds and approximately 10-15% of human

bites become infected. Furthermore, human saliva can transmit such diseases as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, herpes, and syphilis, just to name a few. Bites to the hand (such as those that occur when someone punches another person in the mouth) are the most serious as the bacteria can cause the most damage via the tendons in the hand. Both the National Institute of Health and the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons warn that a bite from another human should never be ignored, especially if the bite broke the skin.

It is important to remember that while a human bite may pose a larger threat than a dog bite, a dog bite should never be ignored either and one should seek medical attention if bitten, particularly because dogs lick everything. A dog uses its mouth similarly to how humans use hands. Take a moment to list all of the things your hands do from the moment you wake up. Now imagine that you never washed them. This is similar to the conditions in a dog's mouth.

So, is there any truth to the old wives' tale "a dog's mouth is cleaner than a human's mouth"? Not really. I advise that our love for our furry friends should stop just short of sharing a plate with them.

GOOD MORNING, WORLD!



# Can Cooking Kill You? The Genotoxic Risks of Working in a Kitchen

**BY ELANA WIESEL** Everyone is aware of the common risks that come with working in a kitchen. Something could catch fire, a glass could break, or an appliance could malfunction, to name a few. However, even when everything is working properly there are still major health risks with the act of cooking itself. All over the world, people are continually cooking in order to provide a hot meal for their loved ones. Unfortunately, they do it unaware of the tremendous genetic risks to which they are exposing themselves.

The main risk factor related to cooking is the cooking oil. In a study by van Houdt et al. to determine possible genotoxicity of particles found inside the home, six samples were taken from various sources around the house, including the kitchen. The sample particles were tested in a Salmonella/microsome assay, which is a test to reveal abnormal change in the metabolic activity of the samples. Although tobacco smoke was the particle that caused the most genetic damage, other particles were also found to cause mutations. The kitchen particles caused many genetic mutations probably as a result of the vaporized cooking products.

Qu et al. found that particularly harmful cooking products include some cooking oils, such as rapeseed (canola) and soybean cooking oils. This was suggested by public health studies in Chinese women that showed that tobacco smoke was not the only risk factor for development of lung cancer. A case-control study showed that cooking fumes might also be a cause of lung cancer. Several different types of genetic tests were performed, which all came to the same conclusion that cooking oil fumes are in fact genetically harmful. However, it was only the

fumes from rapeseed and soybean oil while the fumes from lard and peanut oil were not hazardous. Another study conducted by Yang et al. showed strong support for this hypothesis by showing that cooking oil fumes from frying fish can be carcinogenic. Interestingly, a third study by Wu and Yen showed that peanut oil fumes could cause oxidative stress in lung cells that can lead to cancer. This is contrary to the findings of Qu et al., which demonstrated that peanut oil did not cause genetic mutations. As both studies used different tests and assays to determine genotoxicity, this highlights the difficulty in determining which tests are more clinically relevant for predicting cancer risk.

An alternative mechanism for increased cancer risk due to cooking oils was shown in a study done by Chang et al., which analyzed the effects of dialdehydes, such as trans, trans-2, 4-decadienal. Dialdehydes are abundant in heated oils and have been associated with lung cancer development in women due to their exposure to oil fumes when cooking. The result of adding dialdehydes to lung cells was an increase in oxidative stress. Adding N-acetylcysteine, which is an antioxidant, prevented the cancerous cell growth and release of harmful proteins. This was additional confirmation that cooking oils induce oxidative stress in lung tissue.

A study detailing the hazards of cooking oil fumes has been conducted on restaurant workers. Cooking oil fumes are a complex mixture that includes polycyclic amines, fat aerosols, and particulate matters, which are all proven to be carcinogenic and mutagenic substances. This study showed that levels of these carcinogens are increased in urinary

samples of restaurant workers compared to matched controls.

Aside from cooking oil fumes, there is risk associated with the methods used to generate heat for cooking. Women in third world countries who use biomass fuels such as wood, dung or crop residues, for cooking have an increased risk of stillbirths according to a study done by Mishra et al. According to a study about the risks of cooking smoke exposure to pregnant women, women cooking with biomass fuels are twice as likely to experience a stillbirth compared to those who use cleaner fuels. This is due to their increased exposure to carbon monoxide and particulates from the biomass smoke.

Pregnant women should also be aware that microwave ovens might present a risk factor for spontaneous abortions during the first term of pregnancy. In one study by Liu et al., 200 women who had spontaneous abortions were compared to matched controls. Many factors were analyzed and microwave oven use, mobile phone use, and emotional stress showed statistically significant association with spontaneous abortion. This does not imply a cause and effect but does raise the possibility of harm that should be studied further.

Hyperthermia is a known risk factor for neural tube defects in a variety of animal species. A study conducted by Suarez et al. looked at potential causes of hyperthermia and the risk of neural tube defects in Mexican-American women using a case-control study. They found an association with high fever, saunas, hot tub and electric blanket use and neural tube defects. Working in hot kitchens was of borderline statistical significance.

Besides the environmental risks posed by

the hot kitchen, with biomass fuels, microwave energy and cooking oil fumes, the ingestion of certain cooked foods could result in genetic mutations. Several lines of evidence indicate that cooking conditions can contribute to human cancer risks through the ingestion of mutated compounds from heat-processed foods. Such compounds cause different types of DNA damage as mentioned in the case of cooking oil fumes. Examples include, genetic variations in a DNA sequence that occur when nucleotides in a gene are altered and the condition of having an abnormal number of chromosomes or having chromosomes with missing or extra pieces. In a study by Potential human carcinogens, present in the high-temperature cooking of meats, were investigated in human liver cells by Nauwelaers et al. Though rat liver cell tests for food carcinogens resulted in low levels of cancer, human liver cells results were 100 fold higher. This suggests significant potential genotoxicity.

Based on the various studies previously mentioned, it is clear that the act of cooking in the kitchen should not be treated lightly. People, especially women, must be careful about their choice of cooking oil, the temperature at which they cook their food, and their use of the microwave ovens when preparing even a simple meal. Although many of the studies require confirmation that they apply to the American kitchens, there is enough risk documented that every person who spends time in the kitchen should be concerned. The solution for a hot meal: eat out!

For full bibliography, please view this article online.

