

THE COMMENTATOR

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Penner Leaving as Dean of RIETS, Set to Join the RCA; Sources say Committee of Roshei Yeshiva to Govern RIETS

BY RIVKA BENNUN AND JONATHAN LEVIN

This article was originally published on Dec. 21

Rabbi Menachem Penner is leaving his position as Max and Marion Grill Dean of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), Yeshiva University announced in a YUNews blog post Thursday.

It is unclear who will replace Rabbi Penner, who is set to assume the role of executive vice president of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA). According to people familiar with the discussions, RIETS will be governed by an advisory committee of senior roshei yeshiva, including Rabbis Hershel Schachter, Mordechai Willig, Michael Rosensweig, Mayer Twersky and Yaakov Neuberger.

YU did not respond to a request for comment about such a committee, and YU's announcement only mentioned that Director of Semikha Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz, Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky and RIETS Director of Professional Rabbinics Rabbi Larry Rothwachs would continue to "oversee administrative needs in RIETS during this time of transition."

Rabbi Penner will continue to work for RIETS, serving as dean emeritus and director of strategic initiatives, according to YU's announcement. YU did not respond to an immediate request for comment on when he will step down as dean or details about the transition period.

YU's announcement, which came Thursday afternoon and was accompanied by a press release from the RCA, followed a large meeting with many roshei yeshiva with President Ari Berman.

Rabbi Penner spent less time on campus over the past few months. According to people familiar with the discussions, his

departure was partially due to conflicting visions between him and Berman regarding see a need for a position of dean of RIETS. Rabbi Penner (YC '91, RIETS '94) began

"Rabbi Penner has inspired and educated a generation of rabbis, guiding their vision and their leadership of our collective Jewish future."

—
YU President Ari Berman

the future of RIETS. Some university officials told The Commentator that Berman doesn't as dean of RIETS in 2013, succeeding Rabbi Yona Reiss.

YU's blog post announcing Rabbi Penner's departure was congratulatory in nature, and mentioned his accomplishments at YU, including his work on rabbinic training programs and partnerships between RIETS and YU graduate schools.

"Rabbi Penner has inspired and educated a generation of rabbis, guiding their vision and their leadership of our collective Jewish future," Berman told YUNews. "We are proud that he has been tapped for his extraordinary talent and skill, and I know

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Rabbi Penner speaking during the 2021 Chag HaSemikhah Convocation

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Chanukkah on Campus



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The Ten Best Movies of 2023

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Operation Torah Shield Taught Me That Small Acts of Kindness Go a Long Way

BY RIVKA BENNUN

Students often have a hard time believing they can actually make a difference.

Only a few months ago — what now feels like ages ago — we published our first editorial lamenting student apathy on campus. Our world has vastly

So we arrived at the farms, rolled up our sleeves, and got to work. We spent hours working, our knees deep in mud, and harvested thousands of eggplants and cabbages in moshavim near the Gaza border.

On a broader scale, this may not have made the greatest difference; after all, eight hours of manual labor can only get you so far. But the point

Jews boosts morale, and encourages others to keep going.

Taking care of Klal Yisrael can take many different forms. With so many soldiers drafted to fight, families have been left behind and mothers struggle to run a home and look after their children alone. OTS ran a carnival for such families, where we helped run activities and spend time with the kids. A surprising number of women came up to various students and thanked them for doing this, saying it was the first time they were able to relax in weeks since their husbands had been drafted.

What was supposed to be a small event, something to bring a little joy to a community struggling to stay afloat, was a small act of kindness that ultimately made a difference. It helped mothers who had not had a spare moment to themselves up until that point. One parent even told us that supporting families who are upholding the home front is just as important as supporting soldiers who are on the front lines.

While it is hard to sit in America and feel like you can make a difference, what I ultimately learned on this trip was something we can all internalize: that the smallest deeds still make an impact, no matter where in the world you are. Each person has their own strengths that they can utilize to help, and what might seem insignificant actually makes an impact.

As the semester winds down, and as the war wears on, we shouldn't lose sight of the ways in which we can help. Stay active, keep showing up and show support in your own way. It may be small, but it is ever so meaningful, and it makes a difference.

was that we showed up and did what we could, and in our own small way, we made a difference. While picking some eggplants might not seem glamorous, it made an impact. Every small thing counts, no matter where it is done, even if it may not seem like much.

Showing Up for Klal Yisrael

The Talmud famously teaches that all of Klal Yisrael bear responsibility for one another. Since Oct. 7, we have seen probably the greatest manifestation of this statement in many years, and the response from YU students, including OTS participants, was no exception. We had the opportunity to show empathy and to provide comfort to *acheinu* Bnei Yisrael right there, on the home front. We visited wounded soldiers, shiva houses and army bases, seeing many different people, like all of us here, doing their part.

I felt a little self-conscious at times — I'm a stranger to these people; why would they want me to visit them? Then I watched Rabbi Reuven Brand, who had joined us on our trip, and I observed the way he would sit across from a family in a hospital room, look them in the eye and say, "We are here from America, and we just want you to know that we are with you. We support you." I quickly learned that a simple statement of support and love goes a long way. We as one *chelek* of Klal Yisrael were able to go and take care of another *chelek* of Klal Yisrael.

Every single person's support makes a difference, no matter how they show it. Showing up for other

changed since then, and thank God, we have seen a tremendous boost in student activism as students rushed to help Israel in whatever ways they could.

One such example was Operation Torah Shield (OTS) 3, a week-long student-led relief mission to Israel last month. Armed with duffel bags of supplies for soldiers and dreams of making an impact, nothing could've prepared us, a group of 35 YU students, for what we were about to experience. One week in Israel taught me a lot about how small acts of kindness make a big difference, a message I believe we can all continue to internalize and act upon.

Tending to Admat Kodesh

"Zion's roads are mourning," Yirmiyahu tells us in Eicha as he laments the destruction of the Temple. When the Jewish people suffer, the land suffers as well. Embarking on this mission, I had a great sense of longing to tend to the land of Israel in some tangible way. In the past, Eretz Yisrael had taken care of me; now I needed to go and take care of Eretz Yisrael.

This need to care for the land took its most literal form through farming and cultivating. Many of the farms in Southern Israel employ foreign workers, primarily from Thailand, who perform the manual labor required for farming. Following the Oct. 7 massacre and the start of the war, most foreign workers fled home, leaving Israeli farmers without the labor needed to harvest thousands of acres of produce.

Every single person's support makes a difference, no matter how they show it. Showing up for other Jews boosts morale, and encourages others to keep going.

THE COMMENTATOR

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The Commentator is the student newspaper of Yeshiva University.

For 89 years, The Commentator has served students and administrators as a communicative conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating undergraduate social, religious and academic beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader Jewish and American communities.

The Commentator staff claims students spanning the diverse spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs represented at Yeshiva.

We are united by our passion for living the ideals of Torah Umadda, and a commitment to journalistic excellence.

Read more at yucommentator.org



1

Winter Break!!

Good things always come after hard times. Even if only for 13 days.



2

Operation Torah Shield 3.1

In Israel and have spare time over break? Do a good deed! (technically, it's Operation Torah Shield 4.1 🤔)



3

Dunkin Donuts on Wilf is fully kosher again!

For some reason, half of their menu lost their *hashgacha* for a few days ... what could have been going on in the kitchen?



4

American Dream Mall!

For the third year in a row! Congrats to everyone who organized it!



5

Chanukah on campus

Felt like one of the shortest Chanukahs of my life 🤔



6

Cram & Crunch returns!

Nothing like a midnight snack of some really rich foods ...



7

Graduating students!

We'll miss you!! Stay in touch!! 🤔

7 UP By Commentator Staff
DOWN

Addition of security fee

More sleeping guards!!! More donuts!! More not-so-fast response times!™

1



Finals



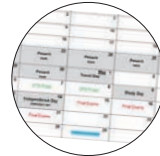
2



Changes to the Academic Calendar!!

There are some positives, like more study time. There are also more negatives, like ... a week to commencement.

3



Rabbi Penner leaving

Rabbi Penner has been dean of RIETS for over 10 years - we will miss him!

4



Beren is running out of room

Taking more than 2 Judaics classes? Drop one! One wonders whether there will be enough housing for next semester?

5



Beren gets a pool!!!

Wait, only a couple of flooded hallways and rooms.

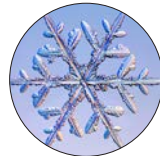
6



It's Winter

So where is the snow?

7



PENNER

Continued from Front Page

he will continue to be a force at YU and the world, sustaining and energizing Torah Judaism, and shaping our students and community through passion, commitment and vast knowledge."

"Everything I have done at RIETS has prepared me for this new role, and it is my natural next stage," Rabbi Penner told YUNews. "Having worked with so many wonderful young men training to serve in *avodas ha-kodesh*, it is an honor to now work with those serving the community professionally, and to tackle 21st century-challenges together as a rabbinic community."

YU's announcement also said that Rabbi Penner's role in the RCA will "contribute to Yeshiva University's reach and influence" by allowing him to use his role at RIETS and the RCA to continue to work with rabbis past their ordination.

Rabbi Penner will replace Rabbi Mark Dratch at the RCA, who made *aliya* in July. At the RCA, Rabbi Penner will work with multiple Orthodox organizations, including RIETS, and will "promote the cause of Orthodox Judaism through its member rabbis, champion the rights and dignity of the Jewish people everywhere, and help strengthen the State of Israel," according to the RCA's press release.

Yeshiva University did not respond to The Commentator's inquiries on Rabbi Penner's departure, originally sent Tuesday, but told The Commentator they would send a statement. On Thursday afternoon, a YU spokesperson directed The Commentator to YU's recently published blog post announcing Rabbi Penner's departure.

Rabbi Penner did not respond to multiple inquiries from The Commentator regarding his departure.

In addition to his new roles, Rabbi Penner also serves as the rabbi emeritus of the Young Israel of Holliswood in Queens, for which he was rabbi for 20 years.

Sruli Friedman contributed to this story.

YU Launches A New Joint Semikha/MBA Program

By DAVID CHRIQUI

This article was originally published on Dec. 20

Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) and Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB) have announced

"Shuls and schools get stronger when their rav or rebbe has leadership and business skills, and the rav or rebbe has a much deeper and broader range of ways to impact the Klal."

Noam Wasserman, dean of Sy Syms School of Business

a joint *semikha* and MBA program, which will be open to students starting this spring.

Due to the MBA program being asynchronous, students can join the program from *semikha* programs around the world, such as Gruss Kollel in Jerusalem, and even the Mir Yeshiva. Students may begin the program even if they have already started *semikha*.

"You can decide how long you want it to take and can even speed up or slow down while you're in the program." SSSB Dean Noam Wasserman told The Commentator.

"You can do it during the times of day and the days of week that are most convenient for you. You can do it from wherever you want in the world, while having a wide and growing range of electives from which to choose."

The two-year program is open to alumni from both Yeshiva College and SSSB, as well as graduates of other universities. Students must complete 42 credits to fulfill the pro-

gram requirements in courses on subjects such as finance, marketing, management and entrepreneurship. All students will take the same core classes, regardless of their undergraduate degree.

"The Semikha+MBA program is a great example of how Sy Syms implements its Mission," Professor Tamar Avnet, the recently appointed SSSB MBA program director, told The Commentator. "This program further strengthens our ability to develop Torah-grounded professionals who excel in the workplace and in the community, by

enabling rabbis to develop leadership and organizational skills and by enabling lay leaders to understand how to bridge the worlds of Torah and business."

The joint Semikha-MBA program aims to equip students pursuing a Rabbinic career with business and organizational skills that can be applied in their positions within the rabbinate, Wasserman told The Commentator. Students going into *chinuch* [Jewish education] could also use their degrees to pursue part-time work outside the

Rabbinate and may tailor their degree to whichever path in business suits them, including real estate, entrepreneurship and business analytics.

Wasserman stressed that he feels that a growing desire of shuls to hire a rabbi with business skills will help spark interest in the program. "Shuls and schools get stronger when their *rav* or *rebbe* has leadership and business skills, and the *rav* or *rebbe* has a much deeper and broader range of ways to impact the *klal* [community]."



YU has announced the launch of a joint semikha-MBA Program

THE COMMENTATOR

The Breather, Active Minds' Mental Health Newsletter, Set to Relaunch after Three Years

By HADASSAH REICH

This article was originally published online on Dec. 17

The Breather, the psychology newsletter run by Yeshiva University's chapter of Active Minds, is set to resume publication

this semester following nearly three years of inactivity.

Active Minds is a student club on both the Beren and Wilf campuses dedicated to promoting awareness about mental health. The club, a chapter of the national Active Minds organization, hopes to use The Breather to provide students with a platform to share personal experiences and help students

access reading focused on psychology and mental wellness.

"We wanted to create a publication where mental health and wellness is addressed and where people feel they can read it for

experience," said Avraham Frohlich (YC '25), Active Minds' Wilf president.

Articles in The Breather are written by students, and touch upon psychology, mental health, wellness, *halacha* and the personal

"We wanted to create a publication where mental health and wellness is addressed and where people feel they can read it for its content and also contribute when they feel they have something they would like to share."

Meira Steiner (SCW '24), co-editor in chief of The Breather

its content and also contribute when they feel they have something they would like to share," said Breather co-Editor in Chief Meira Steiner (SCW '24).

The Breather's staff includes Active Minds' presidents, two editors in chief, Steiner and Sivan Mussaffi (SCW '24), and four editors. Going forward, they aim to print at least one publication a semester and are currently working on their first.

"We're so happy to have such a great team of editors and writers who are committed to bringing student voices on mental health back to the forefront of the college

experiences and thoughts of students. The Breather runs a Whatsapp group for potential student writers with over 50 members.

"The Breather is unique because it provides students with the opportunity to share their passion for mental health awareness in a creative way," Yael Berger (SCW '23), Active Minds' Beren president, shared with The Commentator. "Our goal of starting this dialogue is for students to gain knowledge and resources about mental health and illness. By doing so, we hope to further destigmatize mental illness within the community."



A scene from Stomp Out the Stigma in 2022

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

YU Students Compete in Putnam Mathematical Competition

By CHLOE BAKER

This article was originally published online on Dec. 7

Eight students from Yeshiva University competed in the 2023 William Lowell Putnam Mathematical Competition Saturday night.

The annual Putnam Competition, begun in 1938, is the leading undergraduate mathematics competition in the U.S. and Canada and is known for its difficulty of questions. The competition, which over 4,000 students participate in annually, takes place on the

first Saturday of December each year. This was the first year in several decades that a

"It's important for everyone competing to remember that contest math is first and foremost about having fun and stretching your problem solving muscles. No matter how well you score in the competition, if you had fun, you did well."

Yonatan Beer (YC '25), co-president of the YU Math Club

team of students from YU competed.

The test consists of two three-hour sections with a break in between. Each section

consists of twelve questions, with the first being the easiest and the last the hardest.

The questions are scored out of ten, with the test having a maximum score of 120 points. "The questions range from pretty

hard to brutally difficult," YU Math Club Co-President Yonatan Beer (YC '25) told The Commentator.

The Putnam awards scholarships and cash prizes ranging from \$250 to \$2,500 to the top students, and \$5,000 to \$25,000 to the top schools. Additionally, one of the top five highest scorers is awarded a scholarship for up to \$12,000. The top 100 individual scorers have their names mentioned in the mathematical journal, American Mathematical Monthly, and the names and addresses of the top 500 contestants are mailed to all participating institutions. According to Beer, the results are usually

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YU Acquires Wall Street Journal Subscription for Students and Faculty

By MIJAL GUTIÉRREZ

This article was originally published online on Dec. 20

The Yeshiva University library system has recently obtained an institutional subscription to the Wall Street Journal (WSJ), which is available for all students, staff and faculty.

The new subscription can be accessed by entering wsj.com/yu on a browser and

creating a complimentary Wall Street Journal account. Once the account is created, it can be used for both the WSJ website and app.

“There has long been a need for access to the WSJ at YU,” Justin Thomas, public services and user experience librarian at the Pollak Library told The Commentator. “Besides personal interest from students, staff, and faculty, we have also long had students that are assigned to read the WSJ to complete class content — that it has been deemed essential for multiple courses.”

Previously, the library provided access to the WSJ through Factavia, an online research tool managed by WSJ parent company Dow Jones, which, according to Thomas, was a “cumbersome process and not user-friendly.”

“But those days are gone now that we

is the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive. The archive collects over 50,000 videotaped first-hand accounts by survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust and other 20th-century genocides, including the Cambodian, Rwandan and Armenian genocides. The archive, conducted by the Steven

“I was elated to hear that YU is extending a free subscription to the WSJ for its students. Not only is it an important practical step for the broader political awareness of the YU populace, but it also is a symbolic step that inspires confidence that YU continues to recognize the importance of a broad, cultured and educated student body.”

Baruch Berger (YC ‘25)

have our institutional subscription to WSJ,” said Thomas. “Now library users, be they students, staff, or faculty, can easily access the WSJ’s content through their much more user-friendly website and app.”

In addition to the Wall Street Journal subscription, the YU library provides other resources as well. YU has recently signed up for and is currently trialing Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL). This new subscription is a comprehensive nursing and allied health database, covering nursing, consumer health, biomedicine and 17 other health disciplines.

Another resource available for students

Speilberg-founded Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, also indexes the interviews by subject, data and time.

Students told The Commentator that they appreciated the move by the University to purchase the subscription.

“I was elated to hear that YU is extending a free subscription to the WSJ for its students,” said Baruch Berger (YC ‘25). “Not only is it an important practical step for the broader political awareness of the YU populace, but it also is a symbolic step that inspires confidence that YU continues to recognize the importance of a broad, cultured and educated student body.”



YU has obtained an institutional subscription to the WSJ PHILIP STRONG / UNSPLASH

Approximately 150 Students Join YUPAC in Washington to Lobby Congress in Midst of Israel-Hamas War

By SRULI FRIEDMAN

This article was originally published online on Dec. 15

Approximately 150 students from both the Beren and Wilf campuses traveled to

respectively. Once in D.C., students split into 15 groups, each of which had lobbying appointments with two members of Congress.

Members of Congress lobbied included prominent members of both parties and YU’s representatives. Rep. Adriano Espaillat, who represents Wilf Campus, met with students personally.

Dan Crenshaw and Ritchie Torres, both of whom stressed the importance of maintaining the bipartisan American-Israeli relationship. Reps. Greg Landsman and Dan Goldman, both of whom are Jewish, also joined students to recite prayers for the American government, the hostages held in Gaza and the American and Israeli armed

forces, at the steps to the Capitol.

The trip concluded with dinner at the Israeli embassy, where students had the opportunity to ask questions about the military situation in Gaza and the response of the Israeli government. Following the dinner and prayers, the buses returned to Beren and Wilf campuses.

“Our heartfelt stories and expressions of appreciation impacted the congress members. Yet I feel that the mission impacted the students even more. We left Washington with our heads held high knowing that we performed our crucial role in Israel’s war, but we also left more united and more mission-driven.”

Ezra Sepowitz (YC ‘25)

Washington D.C. with the Yeshiva University Political Action Club (YUPAC) on their annual lobbying trip on Nov. 29.

During the trip, which was rescheduled from the spring 2024 semester in response to the Israel-Hamas war, students met with multiple U.S. representatives and congressional staff members to promote legislation aimed at supporting Israel, penalizing Iranian aggression and combating antisemitism across the country, especially on college campuses.

“Organizing a lobbying trip to DC is something YUPAC does annually,” YUPAC Co-President Jacqueline Englanoff (SCW ‘24) told The Commentator. “But this time around it felt like we had an extra fire lit beneath us. Never in my life have I felt the imminent necessity for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship like today.”

Students traveled on three buses, leaving Beren and Wilf campuses at 5 and 5:45 a.m.

Specific legislation students advocated for included the SHIP Act, aimed at strengthening American sanctions on the Iranian oil industry, \$14.3 billion in military assistance to Israel and resolutions in the House and Senate condemning antisemitism on college campuses.

“The trip was unique from past years because the students felt a sense of urgency and a heightened level of responsibility,” Ezra Sepowitz (YC ‘25) told The Commentator. “Our heartfelt stories and expressions of appreciation impacted the congress members. Yet I feel that the mission impacted the students even more. We left Washington with our heads held high knowing that we performed our crucial role in Israel’s war, but we also left more united and more mission-driven. We, the future leaders of tomorrow, decided that our impact begins today.”

Students were also addressed by Reps.



Rep. Dan Crenshaw addresses students on the Capitol steps

245 Lexington Floods as a Result of Broken Pipe

By SHOSHANA FISHER

This article was originally published on Dec. 15

The Kushner Dining Hall on Beren

“It looked like the ceiling was going to collapse.”

Tamar Giterman (SCW '26)

Campus was temporarily shut down due to flooding on Dec. 3.

The flood, the result of a broken pipe, occurred just as the dining hall was opening for dinner, and filled the hall and first-floor lobby. Kushner dining hall, located on the bottom floor of 245 Lexington Ave., is the only cafeteria on the Beren campus that serves a meat dinner.

“It looked like the ceiling was going to collapse,” Tamar Giterman (SCW '26) told The Commentator. “I walked out without getting anything for dinner.”

Maintenance workers placed large buckets underneath the leakage, which, according to eyewitnesses, did little to control the flood.

The water continued to pour into the cafeteria and the lobby for several hours, while workers attempted to sweep the water out of the building with large brooms.

According to Yeshiva University's Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer, Randy Apfelbaum, the leak to a broken pipe in the toilet on the first floor.

The damage “was minor,” Apfelbaum told The Commentator, and the leak was repaired in time for the cafeteria to reopen the following day. Apfelbaum declined The Commentator's request for a more detailed comment.

“I hope something like this doesn't happen again,” Ayelet Siev (SCW '26) told The Commentator. “The caf literally looked like a water park.”



The Kushner Dining Hall was temporarily flooded Dec. 3

THE COMMENTATOR

YU to Host 99th Annual Hanukkah Dinner Sunday; Will Focus on Israel

By RINA SHAMILOV

This article was originally published online on Dec. 1

Yeshiva University's 99th Annual Hanukkah Dinner, YU's largest fundraising event of the year, will take place Sunday in The Ziegfeld Ballroom in Midtown, and will

focus on garnering support for Israel in its war against Hamas. The dinner's program, mostly unreleased, will include performances by Ishay Ribo and The Maccabeats.

The dinner was originally intended to highlight the achievements of Stern alumni, along with Mordecai D. Katz and Dr. Monique C. Katz Dean of the Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences Karen Bacon, who is set to leave her position to the

Provost's office after a search for a replacement. However, following Hamas' massacre on Oct. 7, the dinner adjusted its focus towards events in Israel.

“After October 7th, the mood across the

University's stance. It is also notably not a celebration.

“None of us are in a celebratory mood,” said Finkelstein. “The event will be meaningful for sure, but it won't be a party

“We contemplated canceling altogether, but we heard from many individuals that they felt strengthened by being among other supporters, and that the existence of Yeshiva University was more crucial than ever.”

Chief Strategy Officer Ellen Finkelstein



President Berman speaks at YU's 98th annual dinner

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MATH COMPETITION
Continued from Page 4

only released a month or two after the test date.

To prepare for the competition, the students participated in weekly two-hour study sessions on Zoom with Professor Miodrag Iovanov, who teaches mathematics at YU's Katz School of Science and Health. Some also studied problems from past competitions.

“It's important for everyone competing to remember that contest math is first and foremost about having fun and stretching your problem solving muscles,” Beer explained to The Commentator.

Since YU students were given a special religious exemption to only start competing Saturday night, they were required to be proctored all of Shabbat to make sure no cheating was taking place. Students were required to remain in Washington Heights with friends and family, and eat meals with

Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky and Associate Dean of UTS Rabbi Daniel Rapp.

“I'm glad the competition included that,” Naomi Rose (SCW '25), co-president of the YU Math Club told The Commentator. “It was basically a math Shabbaton, where the participants hung out all day.”

The students started the competition just around 6:00 p.m., shortly after Shabbos ended. The first section took three hours, and during the break, the contestants went to Lake Como Pizza and had an hour to decompress together before the next section began. Following the break was another three hour section.

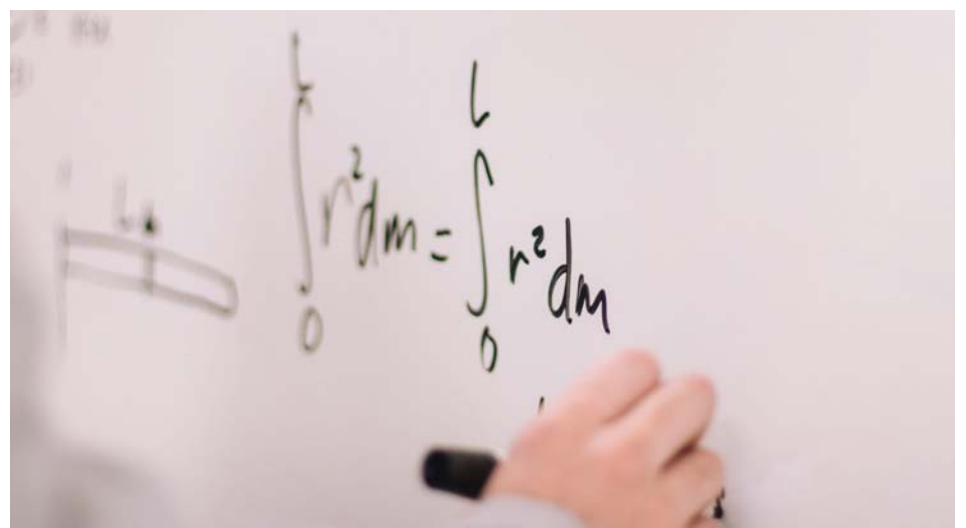
Despite the long hours, both Beer and Rose expressed satisfaction at having been able to participate.

“It was a very hard competition but it was a great experience.” Rose shared. “I hope YU can get involved in other math competitions as well. I would definitely do

this again next year”

“No matter how well you score in the

competition, if you had fun, you did well,” said Beer.



Eight YU students competed in the prestigious Putnam Mathematical Competition Saturday night

JESWIN THOMAS/
UNSPASH

YU in DC: A Chance to Make a Change

By SARA COHEN

They say everyone has a part to play in life.

Whether this role is magnified by the media, lauded by others, or remains relatively unknown, it exists — one alongside the other. When I was in Israel on Oct. 7, I noticed that one of the immediate reactions of many Americans was to “run”. Israel was under attack and we felt surrounded by a haze of sirens and missiles as the entire country was in a state of shock and grief. Like many other Americans in Israel during this time, I was under the mistaken impression that once I was back in New York I would be safe. While over here, we thankfully do not hear sirens or have to dash to bomb shelters, we still are most definitely not as safe as we were on Oct. 6. Between college campuses slandering Israel, misinformation proliferating on social media, Hamas sympathizers demonstrating en masse and antisemitism sharply increasing nationwide and globally, America — including New York — is not the same safe haven for Jews as it once was.

That is why, when the opportunity arose to go to our nation’s capital with the Yeshiva University Political Action Club, I was eager to join. The chance to *do* something, to combat hatred and spread truth, was especially appealing to me. I had the privilege to be part of a group of over 130 YU students who made their way to Washington D.C in order to speak to different members of the House of Representatives and Senate about Israel.

Once there, we split up into smaller groups and made our way to the politicians assigned

to us. My group met with Emily Chaffin, a staff member from Senator Alex Padilla, (D-California) as well as Kevin Sayegh from

The chance to do something, to combat hatred and spread truth, was especially appealing to me.

Representative Mike Lawler’s office (R-NY 17). In both of these meetings, we thanked Emily and Kevin for their support, shared our personal stories and connections to Israel and conveyed the unfortunate reality of what it feels to be a Jew in America right now. They were engaged, asked questions

and seemed genuinely interested. They also professed their representatives’ current and future pro-Israel stance. We spent the day in and around Capitol Hill including hearing from Representative Richie Torres (NY-15), and we concluded with a visit to the Israeli embassy.

It was such a joy to hear Hebrew at the embassy, be around Israelis and see blue and white fly in the wind. We heard from senior members of the embassy staff including deputy military attache Shachar Feinmesser and Deputy Chief of Mission Eliav Benjamin. Although they mentioned the horrors of Oct. 7 and the current gravity of the situation, I walked away inspired by the enormous strength and resilience of *Am Yisrael*. In fact, they mentioned that since Simchat Torah, almost 18,000 Israeli babies

have been born, many with names such as Beeri, Oz or Nova.

I was struck with the Jewish concept of *zachor*; we remember and we fight. However, this fight can emerge in different forms. We might not be aware, but there is a battle to be won here.

We, young college students, have a crucial part to play. As Americans, we need to vote, speak out and stand up for Israel. As Jews, we need to be aware of the importance of *kiddush Hashem*. Whether we like it or not, we are walking ambassadors for Judaism and Israel, and the kindness and respect we show others reflects the Jewish people as a whole. Unlike other times in Jewish history, there is no one battlefield, and not one kind of soldier.

We all have a part to play.



YU’s Political Action Committee (YUPAC) on the steps of Capitol Hill

MOISHE RECHESTER

“It’s So Nice To See Young People At The Opera!” — Stern Honors Visits the Opera

By TALIA FELDMAN

The Stern Honors Program had the privilege to see “Florenzia en el Amazonas” on opening night at the Metropolitan Opera at Lincoln Center on Nov. 16, filling up three rows of the Met’s first Spanish Opera. Set in the early 20th century, the opera tells the story of Florenzia Grimaldi, a famed opera singer who has returned to native South America to perform in Manaus and seek out her lost lover, a butterfly hunter. The

opera ends with Florenzia singing to her beloved and turning into a butterfly, finding himself in her and returning to him in her

in an otherwise realistic world.

After helping a lovely woman take pictures on the stunning red-carpeted staircase,

“Stepping into the Metropolitan Opera House is like entering a gilded palace, a testament to the power and beauty of opera.”

SCW honors student

heart. The opera is an example of magical realism, the portrayal of fantastical events

she proceeded to thank us for coming to the opera: “It’s so nice to see young people at the opera,” she said. And she was correct; as far as I could tell, besides us, there were only older men and women! The average age of the audience at the Metropolitan Opera was 57, the New York Times reported in 2020. As a group of 19 to 21-year-olds, we were definitely below the average.

One SCW honors student was stunned by the Met Opera Building. She said, “Stepping into the Metropolitan Opera House is like entering a gilded palace, a testament to the power and beauty of opera.” At the opera, we were surrounded by sweeping red staircases, balconies with a spectacular night view and glittering chandeliers.

“As a singer and theater-lover I was ecstatic to experience the Metropolitan Opera with Stern Honors,” said Tamara Yehurun (SCW ‘26). “The atmosphere was enchanting: the tremendous theater, elegant gowns, velvet staircases ... I loved every moment.”

I asked program director, Professor Cynthia Wachtell, about what made her decide that the Opera was where she wanted to take the honors students, and she said that she thought the “premise would appeal to honors students,” and enable [them] to

make the most of all that is on offer culturally in New York City.”

Richard Mantle, a general director for Opera North, wrote in an article for The Guardian that opera “offers us a reflection of who we are, how we relate to others, and what it means, collectively and individually, to be human.” As college students, we are deeply entrenched in the battle to discover who we are. This opera, “Florenzia en el Amazonas,” provided the lesson that no matter what we choose to do and who we choose to be, we must find an identity that is true to ourselves and will enable us to find the things meaningful to us deep within our hearts.

All this said, there was, as with every event, some dissatisfaction. Operas are not everyone’s cup of tea, so there were some who attended not so enthused with the opera. One student said that she was not so happy going to the opera because “the typical storyline that operas follow adhere to this archaic idea of...what women and men are and what their gender roles are.” She was not so eager to watch an opera displaying the helplessness of people, especially women, against their emotions. As she said, “Where is the resilience, where is the determination, where is the grit?”



Stern Honors went to the Opera on Nov. 16

CYNTHIA WACHTELL

Getting to Know the Stern Library Staff Part I

BY HADASSAH REICH

As long as the Stern libraries are open, students can almost always be found doing work at the desks, using group study rooms, printing papers, and browsing shelves. The Commentator sat down with the librarian staff to learn more about the people who make this all possible.

Editor's Note: This article was edited for clarity and brevity with the approval of Edith Lubetski, Rina Krautwirth and Rebecca Martin.

Edith Lubetski — Head Librarian, Hedi Steinberg Library of Yeshiva University

Q: Why did you choose a career as a librarian, and was it always your plan?

A: I didn't initially consider becoming a librarian, even during college. My passion for Jewish education led me to contemplate an administrative role in the field but I didn't know where I would fit in. But *hashgacha pratit* was at work, and after a class in Bernard Revel, Dr. Dienstag, the then librarian of Gottesman Library, approached a friend about a clerical position. Since my friend preferred part-time work, she asked me to share the job, which I did. As I delved into library work, I decided to pursue a Master's in Library Science at Columbia University School of Library Science.

Q: What is the educational path for librarians?

A: Librarians typically hold a Master's in Library Science (MLS). Many librarians pursue a second degree in a related field or enter library school with an additional degree. Specialized training is crucial based on the subject area or level of expertise, allowing librarians to work in various settings such as schools, public libraries, or specialized areas like law, medicine, music, art or engineering. All of the reference staff at Beren have advanced degrees beyond the MLS. I have a Master's in Jewish Studies from Bernard Revel.

Q: Describe your day-to-day responsibilities as the head of the library.

A: As the library head, I function as an administrator, focusing on problem-solving and innovation. My days involve working with faculty, students, and staff, planning and implementing projects. For example, with Israel at war, we are currently working on a bibliography of recommended readings about Israel. We made a book display on the second floor library and we are posting on bulletin boards in and around the library relevant newspaper articles. Another project focuses on helping students gain greater access to texts. We asked faculty members who will teach the same class again to request students to donate their used texts so that the library can make them available for the next class. On a regular basis, I address issues such as staffing, collection building, renovation, developing new initiatives, and collaborating with various departments within the library system and other departments within Yeshiva University. The role is diverse, filled with both challenges and accomplishments. I am never bored.

Q: What do you enjoy most about working at Stern and in the library?

A: I enjoy working at Yeshiva University, and particularly on the Beren campus because of the people I work with and the mission of YU. I share the vision of YU, especially as articulated most recently by President Ari

Berman. My children graduated from various YU schools and currently my grandchildren attend YU. I feel privileged to be able to share in the goal of educating generations of committed Jews. I am also fortunate to be working with deans, directors, faculty and support staff who are devoted to providing the best education for our students. My staff is superb and we work together seamlessly in seeking ways to provide the students and faculty with the best possible experience.

"The role is diverse, filled with both challenges and accomplishments. I am never bored."

Edith Lubetski, Head Librarian, Hedi Steinberg Library of Yeshiva University

When you feel you are working with your supervisor as opposed to working for that person, you are very lucky ... My favorite part of working in the library is getting positive feedback from students and faculty about our services. When students appreciate our orientations, class instruction, and personal guidance, we are all gratified.

Q: What unexpected challenges do you face as a librarian?

A: The primary challenge is navigating within a limited budget. Balancing the desire to expand resources and services with financial constraints is an ongoing struggle. The issue of print versus online is a challenge as the students are divided in their preference.

Q: What do you wish students knew about the library?

A: I hope students recognize the wealth of resources and services the library offers, especially our exceptional reference service. While some may rely on Google or AI for research, specialized databases provide more accurate and in-depth information. Faculty members note the improvement in student papers after library instruction, and encourage library engagement. One instructor required students to take a picture with a librarian, and another to locate a specific book.

Q: Do you have any tips or advice for students?

A: Take full advantage of our resources and services. Whether through in-person visits, emails, chat or consultations, don't be shy, seek guidance from the library staff and you will achieve great success in your studies.

Rina Krautwirth — Research and Instruction Librarian

Q: What is your role in the library?

A: Students stop by and ask me reference

questions. I help students with more technical things; student's don't always realize where the printers are or things like how to look things up, like general navigating website-type things.

Q: Why did you want to be a librarian? Did you always know that this is what you wanted to do?

A: No, not always. Basically I found a job as a librarian before I worked here, and

or fixing this or fixing that. Someone will be like "I need help here" and that's where I come in. I'm an extra set of hands.

Q: Why did you want to work in a library? Did you always know that this is what you wanted to do?

A: I moved to New York in January for my graduate school program. I'm studying to be a teacher, and I knew that I needed a job during the day. I was really just looking into things, seeing what was available and this popped up and I was like the location is great, vibes are good, why not? I like books.

Q: What was your relationship with books and reading growing up?

A: Really good. I fell in love with reading in third grade when I read the Percy Jackson series and I haven't put books down since. I spent a lot of time at the library picking up whatever I could find, I mean I liked it enough to want to become an English teacher.

Q: What do you wish students knew about the library?

A: They can really get any sort of research or citation. They are not in the research paper alone, we are all here to support.

Q: Do you have any tips or advice for students?

A: I want to be like "don't wait until the last minute", but like I waited until the last minute. Also, don't read the whole article. You don't need to. Just find the parts that are important, skim through. Nobody is expecting you to read a dense long text. Save yourself the pain.

Q: Are there any perhaps unexpected challenges you face working in the library?

A: I think the biggest challenge is not knowing things. I don't have a degree in library science. My Judaic text knowledge is a little bit more limited. So someone will ask me a question and I'm like "I'll totally have to do a big think about this", but they are all very friendly challenges. I never feel scared to make a mistake.

then once I was working at that job to do more advanced things you need an MLIS (library information science master). A lot of job descriptions for more advanced jobs as librarians will say MLIS, so I did that to do more advanced work than what I was doing.

Q: What is your day to day like in the library?

A: I come in the morning, open the library, walk around make sure all the doors are open correctly in the study rooms, and put up a sign that says "happy whatever day it is". I teach instruction classes, so I prepare for those.

Q: What was your relationship with books/reading/libraries growing up?

A: I read a ton actually, that's so funny you mention that. I read so many books. We had a library in my town and my mom used to take me and we would take out an armful of books and I would just read them. I read so many that we went to the library in the next town, but you could only take out five at a time because we didn't live in that town, so my mom would take out five, I would take out five... I would get home from school and drink milk, eat a cookie, read a book...

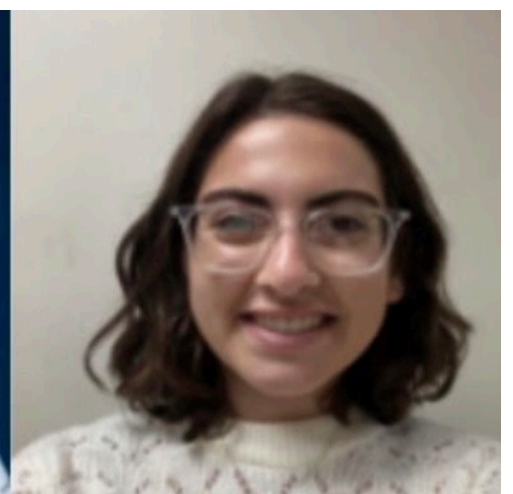
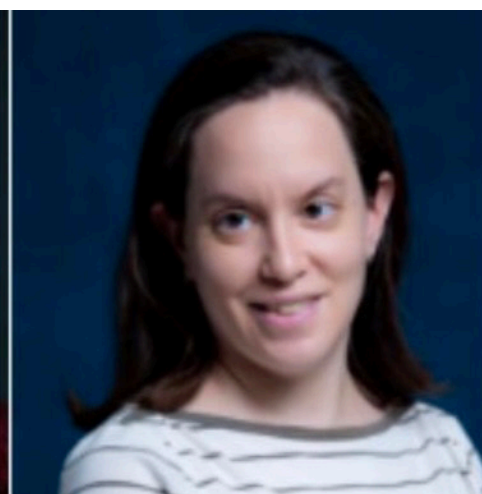
Q: Do you have a favorite genre or book?

A: I majored in biology, so I like biographies of scientists. We have some good ones...

Rebecca Martin — Circulation Associate

Q: What is your role in the Hedi Steinberg Library?

A: I help out where I'm needed. I spend most of my time sitting at the desk and people come with questions. I'm there to answer or help or give directions. And we have different projects going on at all times, whether we're taking inventory of the books



Hedi Steinberg Library Staff (from left right): Edith Lubetski, Rina Krautwirth, Rebecca Martin

From The BCSG President's Desk

The Reality of Student Government

BY AVYGAYL ZUCKER

“Student Government.”

When I hear that phrase, I think of young people in an academic institution making choices, creating programming and forming resolutions with and on behalf of their fellow students. I think of students' ideas brought to life; I think of clubs getting funding. I cannot be the only one who associates the words “student government” in this way.

From afar, it may look as though that is exactly what goes on inside Yeshiva University. One might be right that there was a time when student governments had a checkbook. Students had the ability to vote, elect and budget at their discretion. The students were the ones whose fees were taken, and so officials elected **by the students** were the ones who called the shots.

Today, the system looks completely different.

Over and in partnership with the student government is the Office of Student Life (OSL). OSL is an administrative office which works on behalf of the student experience — from holidays to clubs to trips. This is not to be confused with the Office of Torah and Spiritual Life or the office of Undergraduate Torah Studies, both of which also work with student council and OSL from time to time.

The Office of Student Life is currently comprised of four members. These four administrators are the magic and power behind what goes on in Yeshiva University — from the simple like booking a room for a movie night, to the complex like renting out American Dream amusement park. They do it all. It is them whom we must thank for all that happens in our school.

However, it is also because of this issue that it is them whom we must *defer* to in order to make anything happen. And by “anything,” I really mean anything.

Universities across America have been slowly creating systems that restrict the

autonomy of student governments. I would like to specify that Yeshiva University is not alone in having this issue. Practically speaking, holding the hands of student leaders as they adjust to a new job and to the expected bureaucracy of an institution is a positive thing. However, it is when that hand-holding

event pioneered *by* students *for* students? To be honest, I don't have the answer. I can speculate and throw multiple departments under the bus, but as with all functional institutions, the root of any good or bad decisions is never just a single person or office.

“We are crippled by the very departments that ask us to do more and guilt us over our inaction. We are crippled because when we try and try again, sometimes being told no over and over just becomes too painful.”

does not end that the concerns arise and the impediments develop.

Last year, I was on the Stern College Student Council as the VP of Academic Affairs. My fellow council members and I often felt that there was a lack of communication between the administration, student council and the general student body. This year, I entered as the first president of the newly created Beren Campus Student Government (BCSG) with the primary goal of bridging that gap. However, the more time I have spent on planning and overseeing ideas and events, the more I have seen firsthand where the breakdowns happen.

It is within mine and my council's capacity to be transparent with the student body about what goes on behind closed doors. I have the unique ability to explain to people why they are being told “no,” why YU's Marketing and Communications department won't allow a flier or why the Values in Action Committee might not allow the Wilf councils to sponsor a Broadway show — just to name a few examples. I can help my peers so that planning and creating events is a smoother process in the future. However, the question is, *why* is there this process? *Why* are there so many hoops to jump through and approvals to receive? I would understand if an event was officially run by a department, but an

In Fall 2023, the Broadway club was approved by both campuses' student governments but was approved administratively to only be funded on *Beren*. Thus, BCSG, a council whose funds belong to the constituents of Beren Campus, funds a club that serves not just the Beren Campus but

both campuses. Other issues this semester included LGBTQ clubs being approved by some offices but not by others, and simply, student leaders not being allowed to book rooms for their own events. These are but a few examples of a broader problem.

Personally, when trying to organize a vigil for fallen soldiers and civilians after October 7th, I received no after no. I was told that ‘even if students in other universities can hold memorials, it is too dangerous for Yeshiva University students to do so,’ that ‘we cannot hire security for outside during this time,’ and that ‘it would be too dangerous for YU to advertise events such as this one.’ All the while, I was receiving harsh criticisms from departments asking me and my council ‘why do the students of Yeshiva University lack political action?’ ‘Why aren't you on the streets demonstrating what you believe?’ ‘Students in other universities are

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President Avygayl Zucker, Vice President Rikki Kolodny and Director of Communications Gillian Herszage at the Annual American Dream Mall Chanukah Takeover

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

What Doing the Daf Taught Me About Continuity and Community

BY TIFERET WEISSMAN

The first Gemara shiur at Stern College for Women was given by Rav Soloveitchik in 1977, over 45 years ago. Since then, Gemara has been a cornerstone of advanced Torah learning at Stern College. For close to 40 years, Rav Moshe Kahn *z"l* taught an advanced and intermediate Talmud Shiur. The dedicated young women learning in these shiurim woke up early each morning to grapple with complex texts before sitting down with Rav Kahn to go through them line by line, phrase by phrase until everyone understood the particular Gemara, Tosafot or Ramban.

I had the privilege of learning in Rav Kahn's class for half of my first semester at Stern. Even though Rav Kahn was struggling with his health at the time, he still made an incredible effort to get up every morning to teach his *talmidot*, whom he cared so much about, on Zoom. Despite the difficulties he was facing, he couldn't bear to stop teaching us and ensuring that women at Stern received top-notch Talmud education, focusing on both skills and content. Although I never had the opportunity to meet Rav Kahn in person, not only did I feel I was sitting in the presence of a *Gadol Hador*, but also that I was in the presence of someone who was incredibly invested in my own religious, spiritual and educational advancement.

Last spring, a few months after Rav Kahn's passing, Gemara at Stern took a big hit. The administration announced that they would not be offering any beginner or intermediate level Gemara classes the following semester. This led to an incredible wave of unity from current and former Stern Gemara

I've been learning Daf Yomi for close to three years now and have realized that when not learning in midrasha, it can be a very lonely and daunting experience.

students, as they worked to advocate for the continuation of Talmud education in Stern. Ultimately, the quest to expand Gemara at Stern was successful. This fall saw the quadrupling of Talmud courses offered at Stern, with over 70 students registered.

This semester, I felt inspired to create the Women's Daf Yomi Club on Beren Campus. I've been learning Daf Yomi for close to three years now and have realized that when not learning in *midrasha*, it can be a very lonely and daunting experience. During my first semester at Stern, I began learning with an incredible *chavruta* which has helped me to feel more connected to the Stern learning community and the broader

Torah community.

I wanted to share that sense of support and community I felt from regularly doing the daf with everyone in Stern learning Daf Yomi or considering learning. Learning the daf in and of itself is fulfilling, but it's that much more fulfilling and special to have a group of people to share it with.

This was my goal in creating the Women's Daf Yomi Club: to bring young women who are passionate about the consistent learning

Daf Yomi provides together to support each other and celebrate each other's successes. Every board member of the club is either someone who is currently learning Daf Yomi or is a student in one of the Talmud shiurim, and our membership comprises current Daf Yomi learners and enthusiasts. It has the potential to be an amazing support network for lifelong Gemara learners.

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The *beit midrash* on Beren Campus

THE COMMENTATOR

Feeding the Future

By JEREMY BASSALI

When people hear about environmental concerns — particularly the dangers of global warming — they often associate these ideas with left-wing political positions. This makes sense; after all, the political firestorm-causing proposal to address climate change termed the “Green New Deal” was advocated for and sponsored wholly by progressive politicians. However, it is unfortunate that we have come to approach environmental concerns along partisan lines. Pollution, resource conservation and long-term planning in anticipation of population growth are universal issues and they will not discriminate on individual political affiliation.

Hashem placed Adam and Chava in Gan Eden “*le-ovdah u-leshomrah*,” to cultivate the Garden and guard it (Bereshit 2:15). As Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ז”ל points out in “By His Light,” this extends beyond the natural world and a concern for ecology, though these are worthwhile endeavors as well. Still, Rav Lichtenstein argues, our primary obligation is, one, “to guard, to have a sense of responsibility in relation to that which we have been given,” and two, “to work and develop.”

As the global population grows, the potential to “cultivate” the world through Torah study, worldly innovation and academic advancement increases. Humanity’s desire to innovate and excel can only be realized when our more basic necessities are accessible. Maintaining a healthy thriving society that is well-positioned for future growth can enable us to fulfill Hashem’s mandate to cultivate the world and guard our human values.

Beyond the aforementioned global concerns, a specifically pressing environmental and humanitarian concern that does not get the attention it deserves is sustainable food production. The issue is twofold: More people means more space will be needed

for housing, leaving less room for food. On top of having less available space for food production is the fact that we will actually require *more* space to produce food for the population. Without sufficient arable land, the safety of our food supply system is at

systems and fertilizers. Farmers can also choose to grow their produce in a greenhouse where seedlings are stacked vertically under grow lights, thus saving space. Coupled with hydroponic growing, vertical farming in this fashion would not only save water, it

Vertical Harvest are using these concepts to grow crops in urban areas using less water, less space, and producing more reliable crops 365 days a year. The future of sustainable farming is here and it’s going to grow.

Still, many challenges await the industry. These businesses are having a hard time turning a profit. Despite the hurdles, scientists around the world are committed to bringing sustainable farming to the forefront of our food supply chain. And we, as religious Jews, have an imperative to concern ourselves with these issues.

Farming sustainably is not merely an ecological concern. It is a humanitarian concern that has great relevance to our lives. Just as a doctor’s work or a parent’s care for their child comes with a sense of religious-like obligation to heal and to nurture, so too our food production must come with a sense of responsibility towards our communities today, our children tomorrow and the generations to come.

Growing vertically cuts our land use to a fraction of what it would otherwise be, leaving more space for natural forests, housing initiatives, and even new cities.

risk. The USDA estimates that by 2050, demand for food will almost double. This means that governments — particularly in developing countries — will need to address these significant changes in demand.

This is a difficult world to imagine. We live in America where our supermarkets are almost always stocked with thousands of different products. We hardly ever find our local stores out of stock on staple items. But take a moment to imagine walking into your local Trader Joe’s (or any other supermarket you frequent) only to find that they are out of stock of flour, bread and fresh leafy greens. Imagine your local supermarket tracking your produce purchases and capping your shopping at 5 pounds of fresh produce per week. These scary thoughts seem far-off to us, but they may in fact come to fruition within our lifetimes or our children’s lifetimes.

We therefore need to think and plan wisely for the future of our food security. Our current practices are not sustainable, and we need solutions fast. One such solution is creating a platform that combines innovative agricultural techniques like hydroponic and vertical farming.

Hydroponics is the process of growing crops in nutrient-laden water as opposed to soil. Recycling water in the system saves farmers money and prevents environmental pollution that stems from common irrigation

would also save lots of space. Imagine Belfer Hall was a vertical farm capable of growing enough produce to feed the Washington Heights community. Growing vertically cuts our land use to a fraction of what it would otherwise be, leaving more space for natural forests, housing initiatives and even new cities.

Such ideas are no longer far-fetched or impractical. Vertical farms like Bowery and



Growing hydroponically can provide us with more food using less space

ERWAN HESRY / UNSPLASH

My Watercolor God

By NADAV HELLER

When I was in kindergarten, our teacher, Morah Rachel, read an illustrated account of Bereishit to the class. The book’s glossy cover featured a benign old man with a poofy white beard painted in warm, cozy, outside-the-lines watercolor. His arms were spread wide to invite me into his home or firmly envelop my little body in a hug. This man, of course, was God. That image stuck with me for years. When I aced a hard test, I thanked my watercolor God. When I prayed extra hard to win my seventh grade davening raffle, I prayed to my watercolor God. When I didn’t win that raffle (I never did) I found space in my heart to forgive him, and I knew he forgave me when I needed it.

As I got older, I began to scrutinize that God. I mean, he was a fine God for a child, but he simply didn’t get the complex, totally unique angst of a fourteen year old. But even when we weren’t on speaking terms, the God I was mad at had the same docile smile, poofy beard, and blurry silhouette.

When I first studied Rambam, I became aware of the transcendent, apophatic God that he believed in. I was stunned. Nobody had ever told me that I wasn’t allowed to be friends with God. I felt betrayed! Who was the God I thought I knew? Despite my reservations, the Maimonidean God made sense to me — an all-powerful timeless creator just shouldn’t look like he was made in Clip Art.

And yet, to this day, no matter how much philosophy I read, in my heart of hearts I haven’t outgrown that cozy old watercolor God. I’ve matured and grown and developed

complex theological positions — but when I really need to open my heart and pray, he’s still the God I turn to. When I’m up late at night asking myself ‘what does the Lord, your God, demand from you?’ I see *him*, mag-

of observance in a way that speaks to them. It is no longer endearing, however, when he wears the same tiny choo-choo train *tzitzit* at 22 years old. His great-aunts nervously cluck at one another when he leaves the

“Is it not worth returning to a version of myself that hasn’t learned scoffing cynicism or pretentious doubt? Do our child-selves have nothing to teach us?”

nanimous and familiar, in my mind’s eye.

What am I meant to do with that? Why hasn’t my emotional conception of God graduated kindergarten?

I often reflect on a parable that I first heard in the name of Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky. A young child had a “*tzitzis party*” and received his first pair of *tzitzit* (ritual fringes), most probably decorated with an acrylic choo-choo train or a garish Elmo print. On a young child, this is very endearing. We get to watch their introduction to a new chapter



While I couldn’t track down the original book, this painting has a similar tranquil energy.

MARITNESS SULCER / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

room, wondering why he hasn’t grown up yet. His ratty remnant no longer constitutes a garment appropriate for the *mitzvah*. It’s one thing for a child to have a watercolor God, and another thing entirely for an adult (nevermind a Jewish studies major at YU) to have one.

While preparing for Yom Kippur, I encountered this tension over and over. The Yom Kippur liturgy is rife with analogies that embrace apprehendable and anthropomorphic conceptions of God. The popular *piyyut* “*Ki Hine kaChomer*,” recited on the evening of Yom Kippur according to the Ashkenazic liturgy, compares God to a potter, a blacksmith, a sailor, a glassblower etc. to illustrate our relationship with him. Is this not the same “heresy” I’d been stressing over?

I began to think that maybe I’m not supposed to banish him from my prayers. Maybe I need to embrace my younger self and see the value in his vision.

In several places, Rambam notes that the Torah uses corporeal terms for the benefit of its audience. He writes in Book 1, Chapter 46 of Moreh haNevuchim that the rabbis spoke of God in corporeal terms as a form

of educational parable. If we really know it’s not true, it can be okay to imagine God. Rambam admits a long history of adapting the enormity of God to fit human understanding and even recognizes that the Torah itself is wont to do so (*dibber torah k’lashon b’nei adam*). This is not a fluke — Rambam echoes this thinking in 1:57, 1:29, 3:51 and again in his introduction to the tenth chapter of Sanhedrin (“*hayesod hashelish*”).

Innocence and sincerity are expensive commodities that sometimes only children can afford. Even (and maybe especially) if I know it’s not true, isn’t that worth something anyway? Is it not worth returning to a version of myself that hasn’t learned scoffing cynicism or pretentious doubt? Do our child-selves have nothing to teach us? Wasn’t prophecy taken from the prophets and given to children? Did not God hear the cries of the young Yishma’el “*ba’asher hu sham*—as he was”?

I have no way of knowing exactly what the actual, “capital G” God wants from me, but I imagine that he does not want us to shy away from engaging with him like a child, or like an adult for that matter. Like a watercolor painting, my relationship with God contains many hues, the products of absorbing and repelling different kinds of light, which when combined, yield totally new colors. The dark roiling shade of celestial infinitude sits on the palette right next to the bright innocence of divine immanence. The points where they diverge and combine and diverge again are what create artistic beauty. I’m still learning how to mix those colors, but for the first time I’m learning to accept that they can in fact share a canvas.

Don't Sell Your Apple Stock!

By MIKEY NEUSNER

This past summer, I decided to invest in my first stock. After weeks of research, I chose to invest in Apple Inc. (NASDAQ: AAPL). I bought three shares with an average price of \$192.90 per share. At the time, I thought I was buying the dip, as in early July AAPL had reached a historic high of \$196.19 per share. Little did I know that the stock would continue to plummet, even through the release of the new iPhone 15.

As of writing (November 20th), the stock is priced at \$191.45 per share, which is 1% below the share price from July. The current price-to-earnings ratio sits at around 31, its lowest since May and well below the same benchmark for competitors Amazon and Microsoft. Nevertheless, there is hope for a bright future. With Apple's strong background and their expansion beyond their regular products, now is not the time to sell, but rather, a time to buy the dip.

Everyone can agree that the iPhone 15 release was a flop. On the day the product was introduced in September, the stock fell 1.7%, further articulating the lack of excitement customers had for this new product. Patrick Seitz, author at "Investor's Business Daily," explained that one of the main factors as to why the product was not met with excitement was due to the leaks of news about the new phone ahead of its introduction date. Yet, according to analysts, pre-orders were strong; however, there was not the same demand for the new iPhones as Apple had predicted.

Although interest for the iPhone product may be diminishing, this does not indicate that Apple is heading in the wrong direction. Perhaps customers are waiting for a revolutionary iPhone, one that completely changes the way we use our cellular devices. The iPhone 15 had some new features, but clearly not enough to attract sufficient interest to keep the stock elevated.

Apple continues to release products, the hope being that one will grow in popularity in the coming months or years. Apple recently announced its launching of fresh Macbook

products which they claim will be "faster and more efficient" because of the new M3 chips which they created. If this product doesn't excite customers, the Vision Pro

Airpods. As of 2022, both products have generated over \$41 billion in revenue.

Although there has been a decline in product sales, Apple has such a strong

conditions and thus should be able to rise from the decline it currently finds itself in.

Although many investors may be hesitant to buy, the future remains bright for Apple. They are constantly finding new ways to innovate, and their strong background suggests that this dip is only temporary. If you are an Apple stockholder, stay calm. The returns may not come as quickly as you expected, but you have to understand that with large companies such as Apple, there will always be highs and lows. We are currently experiencing one of these lows, but with the exciting new products that Apple will release, we should expect a rise in the stock soon enough, especially as the market inevitably recovers. Stay patient as you have much to gain.

Although many investors may be hesitant to buy, the future remains bright for Apple. They are constantly finding new ways to innovate, they are generating consistent revenue, and their strong background suggests that this dip is only temporary.

mixed reality headset should. These virtual reality goggles will be available in 2024 and be sold for \$3,499.

This is another push that Apple is making into the wearable tech market, which have been pretty successful historically, with products such as the Apple Watch and

background that its financials remain solid. They regularly post more than \$100 billion in annual free cash flow. In the third quarter alone, Apple reported \$166 billion in cash and marketable securities. This demonstrates that Apple has the ability and resources to overcome poor economic



A picture of Apple stock displayed on the "Stocks" app on an iPad

DIMITRI KARASTELEV / UNSPLASH

Elon Musk Faces Advertiser Boycott Amid 'X' Controversy

By AVIEL PARENTE

In recent weeks, Elon Musk, owner of social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, has found himself at the center of a growing controversy surrounding his social media platform. The uproar began when Musk liked a post deemed by many as

antisemitic, leading to condemnation from various quarters, including the White House.

Major companies, such as IBM and Disney, initiated an advertiser boycott of X following reports of their ads appearing alongside controversial content on the platform. This move sparked heated remarks from both advertisers as well as Musk, with the billionaire entrepreneur delivering a fiery

response during an interview at The New York Times DealBook Summit. "I hope they stop," Musk said about boycotting companies. "Don't advertise."

advertisers will blame Musk. Musk quipped back: "Oh, yeah? Tell it to earth." The interviewer continued, "But they're going to say, 'Elon, you killed the company because you

Supporters argue that Musk's unapologetic approach aligns with his commitment to free speech, portraying him as a defender of open dialogue on social media.

"You don't want them to advertise?" the host responded "No," Musk answered in return. "If somebody's gonna try to blackmail me with advertising, blackmail me with money, go f— yourself. Go. F—. Yourself. Is that clear? I hope it is. Hey, Bob [Iger], I'm sure you're in the audience."

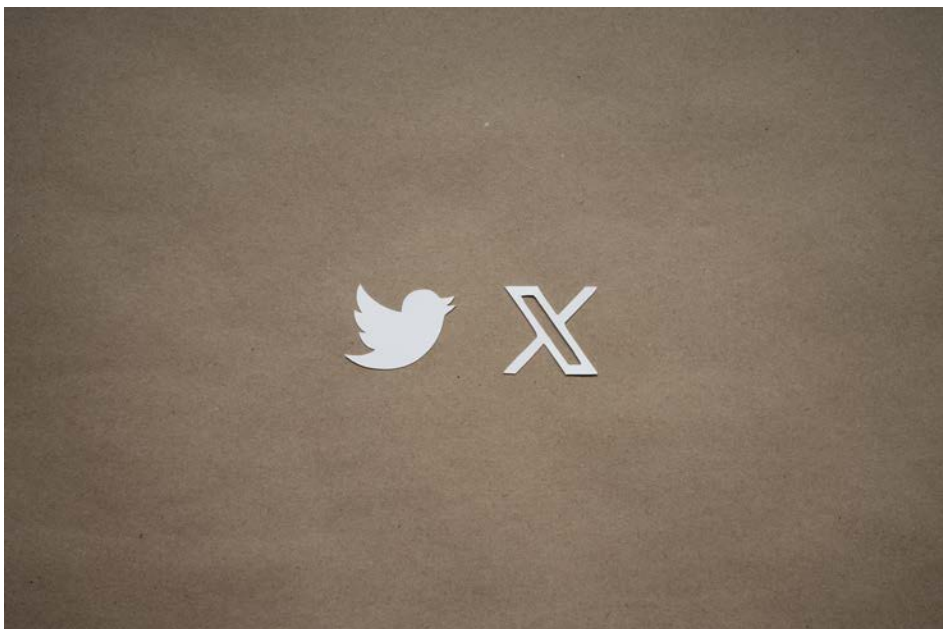
Despite X CEO Linda Yaccarino's attempts to address concerns and emphasize the platform's commitment to combating hate speech, Musk's confrontational stance has deepened the divide. Musk's refusal to back down and his assertion that the advertiser boycott will lead to X's demise have further fueled the controversy: "What this advertising boycott is going to do is it's going to kill the company," he said. "And the whole world will know that those advertisers killed the company and we will document it in great detail."

The host responded by saying that

said these things, and that they were inappropriate things. And they didn't feel comfortable on the platform." "And let's see how Earth responds to that," Musk responded.

Supporters argue that Musk's unapologetic approach aligns with his commitment to free speech, portraying him as a defender of open dialogue on social media. They contend that the advertiser boycott infringes on the platform's independence and highlights the challenges faced by tech giants grappling with content moderation.

As the controversy unfolds, the impact on X's reputation, user base and advertising revenue remains uncertain. Musk's steadfast position may resonate with those who value unrestricted speech, but it brings up issues regarding politics within corporate America, particularly raising questions about the delicate balance between responsible platform management and free expression.



'X' advertiser boycott stirs up controversy

KELLY SIKKEMA / UNSPLASH

Fueling Growth: Unraveling the Recent Consolidation Frenzy in the Energy Sector

By ISAAC WEISS

Recent months have witnessed a massive shift marked by a surge of mergers and acquisitions across the ever-evolving energy sector. Leading energy companies, such as ExxonMobil and Chevron, have recently announced blockbuster deals, the likes of which haven't been seen in the oil and gas industry in decades. This phenomenon prompts an important inquiry: What are the driving forces regarding this recent deal activity? How are these companies executing massive deals amidst challenging market conditions? What implications does this hold for the future of energy giants?

In early October, Exxon Mobil Corporation (XOM) announced they would be acquiring Pioneer Natural Resources (PXD) in a \$59.5 billion all-stock deal. The announcement cemented Exxon's place as the number one oil and gas production company within the United States. Within days, Exxon's largest rival, Chevron (CVX), followed suit. Just twelve days after Exxon's announcement, Chevron announced they would be acquiring Hess (HES) in another all-stock deal valued at \$53 billion. As industry pressure intensifies to partake in the so-called "Merger Mania," many smaller energy companies have begun pursuing their own potential acquisitions. Occidental Petroleum (OXY) is a notable example, as the company, on the verge of purchasing a private oil producer for over \$10 billion, aims to position itself competitively alongside industry giants.

Having touched on these specific deals, let's now delve into the industry trends that are influencing the recent decisions of energy

giants.

One key factor stimulating recent deal activity has been the overall increase in free cash flows for these companies. Oil and gas

Geopolitical events have created a shift in the global energy landscape, prompting companies to reassess and consider new strategic endeavors.

companies are flush with cash for various reasons, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Saudi Arabia's political maneuvering. The sanctions placed on Russian oil imports, and a Russian ban on the export of diesel due to a domestic shortage, have notably boosted the demand for oil and gas globally. This has allowed companies such as Exxon and Chevron to implement significant price increases as supply has fallen. This allows US-based companies to expand their market share, catering to countries that traditionally relied on Russia for their energy sources.

The pandemic also played a significant role in the increase of cash flows for these companies. The decrease in demand for oil and gas, due to travel restrictions and the economic slowdown, led to a significant drop in energy prices. Numerous companies were forced to downsize their workforce, leading to layoffs surpassing 100,000 employees across the field. While the industry has significantly bounced back from the days of COVID-19, many companies strategically opted not to replace the workers they had let go, allowing them to reduce costs significantly.

Geopolitical events have created a shift

in the global energy landscape, prompting companies to reassess and consider new strategic endeavors. This shift, coupled with the heightened demand for oil and gas, has

presented tremendous opportunities for industry giants to consolidate and expand their market share. These are just a few of the factors that have primed energy giants to make a significant bet on the future of the

sector. Companies like Exxon and Chevron strongly believe global demand for oil and gas will remain consistent even as many countries are seeking to cut emissions and transition towards green energy. With inflation easing and the days of interest rate hikes fading, this may only be the beginning of the "Merger Mania" consuming the energy sector. Only time will tell which industry player makes the next move in the unfolding saga of blockbuster deals.



M&A in the oil and gas industry is booming

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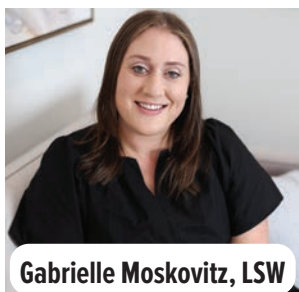
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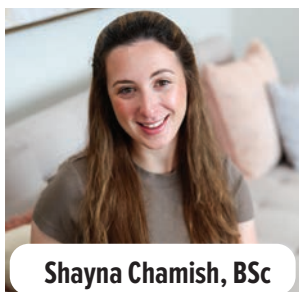
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Max Kirshblum, LSW



Gabrielle Moskovitz, LSW



Shayna Chamish, BSc



Yasilet Fernandez, BSc

DOING THE DAF Continued from Page 9

I came up with the idea to launch the club based on my experience in the Advanced Talmud shiur. We spend two days a week learning difficult *sugyot* in the *beit midrash* with a *chavruta*, drawing on our own and our *chavruta's* knowledge and consulting with our fellow *shiur* members to understand the complex sources. This provides an incredible opportunity for *talmidot* to grapple with complicated *sugyot*, interpret and connect different *rishonim*, and most importantly,

spend time in the *beit midrash*, creating a "kol torah" that livens the whole building beginning every morning at 8 a.m.

My goal in creating the Daf Yomi Club on Beren Campus is to recreate this experience for other students in a way that is more informal, accessible and widespread. The consistency Daf Yomi provides is central to building a life founded on Torah values and having a community can make it that much more powerful. My hope is that this club can contribute to the creation of this community and encourage a consistent learning culture amongst women.

STUDENT GOVERNMENT Continued from Page 9

showing up and creating events. This is the flagship Jewish university! If anyone should be standing up for Israel, it is our students!

And to that I answer: We are crippled.

We are crippled by the very departments that ask us to do more and guilt us over our inaction. We are crippled because when we try and try again, sometimes being told no over and over just becomes too painful.

Despite all of this, I do not wish any readers or students to feel jaded. I know firsthand that when you jump through enough hoops, you land on your feet on the other side. The very vigil I mentioned before, AZKARA, came about through arduous efforts but was a wonderful success. Because of the university bureaucracy, there have been events where I was forced to contact multiple departments, ask for funding, negotiate and make decisions — sometimes decisions that students or administrators are not happy with. However, as president, one needs to make hard decisions in order to keep things functioning. There is no way to make everyone happy, but making these tough calls has had the silver lining of giving me experience

I never would have had otherwise.

We must keep in mind that there are motives and ends toward which each department and administrator at Yeshiva University is working. There are ins and outs to this university — and any university — that the students just may never see. From accreditation to grants, much of the university's functions are rightly outside of our hands as student leaders. But a lack of responsibility in some areas brings a lack of control in others. The machine of YU may or may not be well-oiled but either way, there is much to keep in mind when contemplating the shortfalls of student government.

As I mentioned above, there was a point when students had a lot more leeway and control. I don't know when or why it was changed but I do know that these changes and this reality is well entrenched in the current system of the university — a university which has amazing faculty working toward creating a wonderful student experience. At the end of the day, I may just be a cog in the machine, but as my first semester as president comes to a close, I look to my second — and last — semester to keep fighting, to keep the "Student" in Student Council.

A Play Within a Play: A Review of SCDS's 'The Anastasia Trials in the Court of Women'

By SRULI FRIEDMAN

This article was originally published online on Dec. 4

Art so often touches the borders of the aspirational. The poet or the dramatist may shamelessly impinge upon the domain of philosophers and moralists, weaving his or her tapestry of the innermost longings of human nature or the lofty heights of human ideals. It isn't uncommon for a play, a seemingly descriptive representation of events, to trespass into the dimension of normative value judgements, to subtly or explicitly laud certain virtues or specify the path a society must take. But what happens

The court of women is unlike other courts. It tries crimes committed by women against women, and the audience serves as judge and jury, guiding the trial and ultimately determining the final verdict.

when our ideals clash with grim realities, and it becomes clear to us how we inevitably must fail to instantiate in our own lives the elevated values for which we advocate?

"The Anastasia Trials in the Court of Women," written by Carolyn Gage and Don Nigro and performed spectacularly by Stern College Dramatic Society (SCDS), admirably tackles this question. The play within a play — which I had the privilege of viewing in advance Friday morning — follows a women's theater company producing a rather unconventional courtroom drama, in which five women accused of betraying Grand Duchess Anastasia Romanov, the final surviving heir of the Russian Tsar, are tried in the 'court of women,' and charged with the heinous crime of denying Anastasia her identity.

The court of women is unlike other courts. It tries crimes committed by women against women, and the audience serves as judge

and jury, guiding the trial and ultimately determining the final verdict. However, the women of the theater company have their own internecine struggles, ultimately leading them to turn on each other. Although the actors seek to play out the imagined conflict occurring in their script, they cannot resist the contention and intrigues among themselves from bursting to the forefront. The story of a princess tortured by those she trusted becomes inextricably linked with the stories of the actors, sending the play careening off script toward a startling new conclusion. By the end, the actors must contend with the proper role of feminism and the destiny of their company in a world in which their ideals of true equality seem chimerical and victimization remains inevitable.

Despite occurring entirely within the confines of a single sparsely furnished set, like the famous courtroom drama "12 Angry Men," the world of "The Anastasia Trials" seems far from limited. Rather than stretching itself across spatial dimensions, it probes the near-infinite depth of the human psyche. The audience can't help but be swept up in the drama, which, brought to life by terrific acting, presents a window into the souls of the characters and the characters' characters in all their manifold complexity.

Although explicitly catered toward adherents of radical feminism, the drama seems to furnish a fascinating philosophical object of thought even to those who don't share its vision or who reject the premises it takes as axiomatic. While occasionally I found the script difficult to parse as one unfamiliar with feminist thought, and in some cases found arguments or ideas being put forth as objectionable, I definitely see its broader

themes as easily comprehensible to those of a wide variety of ideological backgrounds. I would confidently encourage students to

book tickets for the remaining two performances which will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday.



SCDS is putting on a performance of "The Anastasia Trials in the Court of Women" play.

MIRI GRANIK / STERN COLLEGE DRAMATICS SOCIETY

A Jewish Poet in Our Time: An Interview with Yehoshua November

By REBECCA GUZMAN

Editor's Note: This article was edited for clarity and length with the approval of Yehoshua November.

It is very rare to find an Orthodox Jewish author who masterfully infuses their work with teachings of Jewish tradition. The poet Yehoshua November does this so beautifully and radically in each of his works. After receiving his BA from Binghamton University and his MFA from the University of Pittsburgh, November attended Chabad yeshiva in Morristown, New Jersey. For two years, he ceased to write. Eventually, November decided to return to poetry. He is the author of the poetry collections "God's Optimism" (2010) — a finalist for the L.A. Times Book Prize — and "Two Worlds Exist" (2016) — a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award and Paterson Poetry Prize. November's poems have appeared in Cider Press Review, The Sun Magazine and The New York Times Magazine, amongst others. November has taught at Touro College and Rutgers University. He lives with his wife and children in New Jersey.

Rebecca Guzman: How did you become interested in writing poetry?

Yehoshua November: My father played a lot of music in our home, lots of Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Simon and Garfunkel, Roy Orbison, Marty Robbins. There was always that constant backdrop of music, and it was poetic. My father also paid [myself and my siblings] ten dollars for each

"Poets try to mine the ordinary, everyday experiences for deep meaning; poetry aims to slow people down and show them the miraculous nature of the present moment."

Yehoshua November

book we read, since as kids we resisted reading. My grandmother, my father's mother, was a poet. My older brother, Baruch, is a poet, and he was writing stories and poems when we were younger as well. My younger sister, Deena, is also a poet. Out of four siblings, three of us became poets.

In college, I was an English major. When my professors — who were established writers themselves — supported and encouraged the work I was producing in their classes, I started to take myself seriously as a writer. I think I also turned to poetry because it conveys so much in such a small space. Young people have a great need for communicating with the world and poetry offers that. Poetry provides a poignant and compressed

means of conveying your identity and sharing your stories and pressing concerns. I'm not sure other art forms can match poetry in this regard.

RG: Who are your strongest poetic influences?

YN: Adam Zagajewski, a Polish poet who recently passed away, is definitely one of my strongest poetic influences. He was born in Lvov, Poland, right after the Holocaust. His family was displaced by the Russian forces. [Zagajewski] writes of the city of his birth, Lvov — it's a mythic city for him. Often, his poems start off in the mundane but then lift off and reach transcendence.

My other poetic influences include Yehuda Amichai, Louis Simpson, Marie Howe, Philip Terman and the family-oriented poems of Sharon Olds. These poets' works are accessible and, therefore, especially good to teach. Many students have been trained to think of poems as riddles, as if the harder the poems

are to understand, the better. Marie Howe's work — for example, her poem "What the Living Do" — undermines that approach. Her work is a good introduction to contemporary poetry, demonstrating that a poem can tell a clear and moving story.

I've also been influenced by the writers I studied under: Liz Rosenberg, Tony Hoagland and Maria Gillan. Gillan encouraged me to write about Judaism and familial life. In college, like many young writers, I tried to write universal poems. She taught me that "the universal is in the particular." Meaning, when you get particular about your religion, culture, life experience, etc., then your work is more likely to resonate with a large readership and have universal impact.

RG: Could you walk us through your writing process?

YN: The process changes over time. Now, I find it difficult to sit down and write a poem that works as a complete piece unto itself. Instead, I tend to write poems comprised of sections, almost like creating a collage. I'll see an interesting image or come up with a phrase and then write it down. When I have a collection of these related images, I'll put them together, separating them into numbered sections, and they can bounce

Continued on Page 14

YEHOShUA NOVEMBER
Continued from Page 13

off of each other and work as a larger piece. But the poems I'm most satisfied with usually come more effortlessly, often in one sitting. For example, my poem "Baal Teshuvah at the Mikvah" was written in pretty much one draft. I saw an image that was striking — a *baal teshuva* with tattoos at the mikvah — and I had the sense that I would write a poem about it.

RG: How does someone translate Jewish experience into something that speaks to a broader audience?

YN: When you speak about what you know and what touches you, you can't really worry too much about the audience's prior knowledge. If you worry too much, you won't write the poem you need to write. You'll lose the culture and richness of the poem — and, often, that's what defines and empowers the poem.

RG: The number of young Orthodox Jews pursuing careers in the humanities is seemingly dwindling. There is, in most communities, the fearful sense that a career in the humanities would be antithetical to an Orthodox lifestyle. Where do you think this fear comes from, and how can we combat it?

YN: Of course, there is a practical concern of how to support one's family — I don't think we can change that. A lot of people who aren't inclined to opulent, luxurious lifestyles will go into studying or teaching Torah. This is also a poetic encounter, I think. When I was studying under the poet Tony Hoagland in graduate school, he asked if he could accompany me to the Chassidic shul I attended. On our walk back, I asked him if he could ever give up poetry. To my surprise, he said, "I could stop writing if I had the same spiritual imagination as those men in shul."

If you look at other groups, aside from the Jewish population, and ask what percentage of that group pursues poetry and the humanities — the answer would be "not a high number." Jewish communities steering away from the humanities is part of a larger trend. We are also fortunate to have a rich spiritual tradition that nourishes us. At the same time, we would do well to give that spiritual tradition full artistic expression through poetry and other art forms.

RG: You took a two-year break from poetry in order to study chassidus. In an interview with The Jewish Standard, you explained, "The whole time I was in Morristown I wasn't writing anything. I wanted to immerse myself in gemara and chassidus." What made you start writing again?

YN: My career launched at the time that I was learning *chassidus* seriously. When I finished my MFA (Master of Fine Arts) at the University of Pittsburgh, I went to a Chabad yeshiva in Morristown, New Jersey. I didn't write...I don't think I even read an English book for two years. And then I had to choose what I wanted to do after yeshiva. I was at a crossroads; I had to make a decision about how I would support my family. Surprisingly, I felt compelled to teach in university and go back to poetry. I felt like I wouldn't be true to myself if I gave that up and became a rabbi. I took out the manuscript I had written to complete my MFA program, and I started adding new poems. About half of the poems in that manuscript — which became my first collection, "God's Optimism" — were written before I went to yeshiva in Morristown, and half of them came after. There's a teaching in the eighth chapter of the Tanya — an eighteenth century work of Hasidic philosophy — that explains how Maimonides and Nahmanides used secular wisdom to serve Hashem. With the help of a spiritual mentor who knew me well, I came to understand that Judaism is a lot larger than I had imagined, and I, too, might use the "secular" means of poetry to serve Hashem.

RG: How has Jewish theology come to influence your work over time?

YN: *Chassidus* is a touchstone in my writing. When you study Torah and *Chassidus*, you encounter biblical idealism. Judaism sets a high bar for us, and then we live our actual lives, where we struggle to reach that bar. A lot of my poetry concerns the tension between that idealism and the human struggle to reach it. I also see overlap between Chassidic theology and the contemporary poetic insistence that profundity resides in mundane encounters. The notion that Hashem actively recreates the world out of nothingness each moment—and, therefore, the everyday, minute by minute, holds unprecedented Divine energy—is central to Chassidus. In a similar spirit, many of today's poets try to mine ordinary experiences for deep meaning; poetry aims to slow readers down and show them the miraculous nature

of the present moment.

RG: In your poem "Two Worlds Exist," you write, "Everything that occurs in this life / flows down from the hidden world." The theme of that poem, as it appears to me, is about how to grapple with incredibly difficult life experiences. As the Jewish nation reflects on the immense tragedy of the last two months, how can poetry itself help us cope with darkness?

YN: This is a very good question. I think poetry can poignantly express profound truths in a compressed space, as I said earlier. People can overlook truth or be numb to truth, especially the truth of other people's suffering, but a poem can shock readers back to life. Contemporary poetry emphasizes imagery over abstraction; it largely aims to "show" rather than "tell" the author's

experience or truth. It, therefore, affords a reader a direct experience of the author's reality rather than a conceptual or indirect rendering of it.

Many are displaying antisemitism unashamedly now, but some don't realize the Jewish nation's pain. They are numb to our anguish. Capturing our sense of alienation and abandonment in a poem — capturing the painful experience via images, metaphors, and idiosyncratic particulars, as perhaps only poetry can do—may help sensitize readers to our predicament. Literature is — and always has been — so powerful in combating hate because, in rendering human suffering so vividly, it humanizes victims who are otherwise seen as "other." Perhaps, to some extent, poetry can do the same to help combat antisemitism and restore a measure of normalcy to Jewish life in these troubling times.



"Poetry conveys so much in such a small space, and young people have a great need for communicating with the world and poetry offers that."

YEHOShUA NOVEMBER

גברים. נשים. תינוקות. קשישים.
עדיין חטופים על ידי חמאס
#BringThemHomeNow

The Ten Best Movies of 2023

By SAM WEINBERG

Optimists had a lot to point to this year. While the prolonged Writers' and Actors' Guilds strikes certainly did little to bring about such optimism, new works from a large number of this century's most acclaimed filmmakers, delivering on both the biggest and smallest of narrative scales, brought a lot of hope to fans of film. The sheer number of great works makes picking just ten a near-impossible task; any year that can't provide room for a new Christopher Nolan or Martin Scorsese film, even while characteristically excellent, is one worth celebrating. It may be trendy to complain about the state of movie theaters or to express disdain for some great films being sidelined in popular culture. But when going through the year's highlights, it's hard not to get excited. And so, the following ten films are not just great but genuine *crème de la crème*; truly exceptional works.

It's hard to imagine a slate in recent times better than this one, and these ten movies show it.

Just missed: "Killers of the Flower Moon," "Asteroid City," "Barbie," "Oppenheimer," "Perfect Days."

10. "Monster" (dir. Hirokazu Kore-eda)

Kore-eda, miraculously both one of global cinema's most prolific and most consistent filmmakers, shifts tones with "Monster." He built a reputation for himself as a humanist master and has often been compared to the great Yasujiro Ozu. With his latest, he surprisingly evokes Akira Kurosawa's "Rashomon." "Monster" presents competing narratives regarding both the troubling developments of a young boy and his schoolteacher and that same boy's relationship with a classmate he is accused of bullying. The twisty and unpredictable storytelling choices provide for surprises not typically found in Kore-eda's movies. Yet the film's richness in character and profound sense of nuanced feeling, albeit darker than normal, remind us that he remains one of the most exciting filmmakers in the world today.

9. "Anatomy of a Fall" (dir. Justine Triet)

Not every year features a leading performance as mesmerizing and dynamic as Sandra Hüller's (see Cate Blanchett in "Tár" for another example). Yet "Anatomy of a Fall" is too well-crafted and well-written to be praised only for its star. A husband is dead, and his wife is on trial for the murder. "Anatomy" is too smart to resort to cheap narrative tricks; for two and a half hours, that basic premise, along with a small handful of gradually progressing developments, is more than enough to hold the viewer's attention. The Cannes Film Festival's Palme D'Or is an incredibly hit-or-miss award, and thankfully, this year's winner is an absolute hit.

8. "Fallen Leaves" (dir. Aki Kaurismäki)

While walking into a Lincoln Square theater to catch this one, I had almost no precedent or set of reference to craft any expectations. I'm sure if I had any, it'd have surpassed them. This movie is deeply, achingly wonderful — a decidedly modern love story set with the aesthetics of a picture from the mid-70s. Aki Kaurismäki's newest movie is hardly structurally novel: boy meets girl,

boy loses girl, and, spoiler alert, boy wins girl back. It's the unique tone, mixing modern cynicism with a sense of classic magic, that makes this one stand out. It would certainly be an inspired choice for a Best International Feature Oscar if Kaurismäki doesn't withdraw again. And who knew the Finns had such a sense of humor?

7. "Green Border" (dir. Agnieszka Holland)

Scorsese is quoted as saying, "Cinema is a matter of what's in the frame and what's out." It's unclear what the source of this quote is, and that ambiguity may explain why only the first part of the quote made its way to Poland. The raw brutality of much of the film is a focal point; little is left to the imagination. Refugees try to make their way into Poland from Belarus, and Holland's storytelling method is to tell it exactly how she sees it, nothing less. As I noted in my article on the New York Film Festival, "Green Border" is uniquely upsetting and violent, and it evokes more than anything else "Come and See," which I think to be one of, if not the greatest war film I've seen. Poland would be proud of this one if it wasn't so wildly damning to its national pride.

6. "The Killer" (dir. David Fincher)

If "Green Border" shows how horrible contemporary violence is, "The Killer" shows just how fun it can be. Michael Fassbender plays a sociopathic hitman who, while typically efficient, shoots and hits the wrong target, spiraling into a global chase and revenge story. One need not watch the film to understand that Fincher sees himself in this character, a worker identified by his precision of method. Yet only in watching "The Killer" can one appreciate just how exact and calculated Fincher's filmmaking can be. This is a movie defined not by its broader themes and ideas but by the thrilling, breathtaking achievement of its moment-to-moment filmmaking.

5. "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret." (dir. Kelly Fremon Craig)

I've put four foreign movies on this list so far, so it is within my right to get a little less pretentious with this one. It's hard to imagine a more successful or effective version of this story. In a perfect world, "Are You There God?" becomes a seventh grade

sleepover classic (one of the only optimistic ways to explain its box office performance). With loving insight and poignant emotional heft, Fremon Craig's second movie is more than a worthy adaptation of the beloved Judy Blume novel. Rachel McAdams is the highlight of a lot of things she's in, and "Are You There God?" may be her crowning achievement, bringing a lived-in depth to the mother character that perfectly utilizes her likeability and the audience's immediate sympathy for her.

4. "Maestro" (dir. Bradley Cooper)

The "I'm sorry, I wasn't familiar with your game" movie experience of the year, Cooper's second directorial effort is leaps and bounds ahead of his already wonderful "A Star is Born." If that film was the pinnacle of a contemporary crowd-pleaser, with genuine filmic talent crafting an accessible and popular narrative, this one is a portrait about and from someone attempting to solidify his name in the halls of elite American artists. Some have used the phrase "impressionist" to describe the storytelling methods Cooper utilizes, and while the word is likely misused, it highlights the unique and deep beauty "Maestro" exudes. While the visible excitement of the artistic endeavor echoes an American sensibility, it's the English Carey Mulligan who has rightly been deemed the movie's most valuable piece, bringing the perfect marriage of melodrama and groundedness the movie demands. I'm unsure if this is a masterpiece in a global sense, but I'd say it's a profoundly American one, nose controversy and all.

3. "All Dirt Roads Taste of Salt" (dir. Raven Jackson)

Movie fans often want, paradoxically, to have a wholly unique perspective on the greatness of a movie while also receiving validation from others. In practice, I thought I had a hot take with "All Dirt Roads," describing Jackson's debut as the arrival of a giant and a monumental debut. I then learned, through other rapturous reviews and "best of" lists, that I wasn't alone. This is to be expected, though, since the greatness of "All Dirt Roads" is evident to all those who have been privileged enough to bathe in its warmth, its composition and its investigation of the cycling of generations. Certain images and fragments of narrative

(which is, in truth, all the narrative you get here) have become indelible in my mind, imprinting themselves into my mind with the weight of any other recent major work.

2. "The Zone of Interest" (dir. Jonathan Glazer)

I hate the cheapness people place on the word "important" when describing certain films. Yet it's hard to find a more accurate one for "The Zone of Interest." In truth, this may be the first truly important movie of the decade. The movie portrays the Höss household, their domestic endeavors and daily motions, while living next door to their patriarch's worksite, Auschwitz. Much has been written about the intellectually appropriate method of portraying the horrors of the Holocaust without exploiting Jewish pain for thematic effect; Haneke's critique of "Schindler's List" for creating tension out of whether a shower has gas or water rings fair. Yet less has been written about how focusing the movie on the wicked makes its observations all the more unsettling and effective. This is not a movie that merely describes the unspeakable; it confronts the viewer with it, making the unspeakable be itself the point. If the Polish took the first half of the aforementioned Scorsese quote, the British took the second. Witness.

1. "Past Lives" (dir. Celine Song)

Was there ever a doubt about the top spot? Since seeing "Past Lives" in June, I figured the rest of the year would be a competition for second place. Celine Song's debut features a marriage of profound thought and hard-hitting melancholy found rarely on the screen, in this year or in any other. Following a thirty-something Korean immigrant confronted with a childhood love (whatever a "love" can look like at age 12), "Past Lives" explores the intensely human frustration of, by necessity, living one life and having one single trajectory. Anyone who has ever been confronted with regret, self-doubt, or is interested in the notion of soulmates or connections external to circumstance would find themselves in "Past Lives." There is no cheap drama or silly narrative developments; this is raw human feeling, the good and the bad, nothing more, nothing less. No new release has hit me like "Past Lives" in this young decade.



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