

# THE COMMENTATOR

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## State Senators Demand Accounting of YU's Use of State Funding; Condemn Policy Towards Pride Alliance

By RINA SHAMILOV

Three New York State Senators sent a letter to President Ari Berman Jan. 11, condemning Yeshiva University's policy towards the YU Pride Alliance and requesting an accounting of \$230 million in state funding given to the university, alleging they had "been obtained by misrepresentations."

New York State Senators Brad Hoylman Sigal, Liz Krueger and Toby Ann Stavisky requested "a full and complete accounting" from YU over its use of the funds by Friday, 30 days from when the letter was sent. A YU spokesperson did not answer The Commentator's inquiries about whether the institution will comply with the senators' request.

"As members of the New York State Senate," stated the letter, "we are concerned about the discriminatory treatment of LGBTQ students by Yeshiva University (YU) while receiving funds from the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) and other state funds."

YU received state funds in the form of bonds in 2009 in 2011, to help the university maintain and "finance the construction and renovation of its buildings and facilities."

According to the letter, DASNY loaned YU \$140,820,000 in 2009 and \$90,000,000 in 2011. The university delegated the funds toward repairing some of the existing buildings "and equipping of the exterior and/or

interior of existing facilities located at the University's campuses in the Bronx and Manhattan, in New York City, including the refinancing of certain taxable debt that financed a portion of such expenditures."

According to the letter, the university obtained financial support, but then, in 2019, rejected the YU Pride Alliance as an official club on the grounds that it violated the university's religious freedom since YU is a "religious corporation." The letter highlighted other "contradictions" as well, citing Yeshiva University's assertion that it is an "independent, coeducational, nonsectarian, not-for-profit institution of higher education" to the State of New York, which is what allowed the institution to receive funds in the first place.

DASNY issued financial assistance based on the university's promise of upholding DASNY's requirements, including that it not be used for "sectarian religious instruction." By denying the Pride Alliances' attempts to form, the university violated DASNY's requirements, the letter alleged.

"We will not abide the use of state funds to support discriminatory behavior that excludes LGBTQ students from their right to an equal education," the letter concluded.

"If their claims were intentional", it continued, "this misrepresentation could constitute fraud and merits a criminal inquiry. Discrimination has absolutely no place in New York, nor should New York State taxpayers be on the hook for it."

Brad Hoylman-Sigal, one of the leading senators in the demand, shared his frustrations over YU's treatment of its LGBTQ students with The Commentator.

"Religion is not an excuse for bigotry," Hoylman-Sigal told The Commentator. "What a shame that an institution of higher learning — which receives millions of dollars of public aid — is putting its LGBTQ students in this untenable position. Yeshiva University must follow the law and recognize the Pride Alliance."

After the letter was released, YU issued a response, calling saying that the letter's claims of YU's alleged discrimination was "equally false and offensive."

"In the last five years, including this past summer in *Carson v. Makin*, the Supreme Court has three times ruled that the government may not restrict funding to religious schools because of their free exercise," stated the university. "And no government can ever retaliate against anyone for defending their religious beliefs in court. Yeshiva will continue to defend its right to religious liberty while ensuring the right of its students to be treated by the state on equal footing with students at every other university."

On Feb. 9, after publication of this article, YU spokesperson Hanan Eisenman doubled down on YU's previous response, calling the senators allegations "categorically not true," and saying that DASNY "routinely backs bonds for religious schools, including theological seminaries."

The senators' letter comes as YU is in court with the Alliance, which sued YU for discrimination in April 2020. In June, a judge directed YU to recognize the campus club, which was upheld by the New York Supreme Court. YU has since appealed the ruling again, this time to the Court of Appeals, the last stop before the Supreme Court, which previously declined to issue a court-ordered stay on the June ruling in a 5-4 vote.

A stay has been signed between the Alliance and YU.

*Editor's Note: This article was updated on Feb. 8 to clarify that DASNY's funds were in the form of bonds and to include YU's statement, which was inadvertently excluded.*



Three New York State Senators requested YU give them a full accounting of its use of state funding

KENNETH ZIRKEL / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

## UTS Running "Ben Torah in the Workplace" Chaburah This Month

By EZRA BARON

Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) is running a "Ben Torah in the Workplace" chaburah each Wednesday this February, aiming to help prepare students entering the workforce for religious challenges they may face.

Meeting for lunch each week, the chaburah has already heard from YU Rosh Yeshiva Rav Yaakov Neuberger, as well as Noah Isaacs, a YU alumnus, in their first meeting last Wednesday. The chaburah is also scheduled to hear from YU Rosh Yeshiva Rav Herschel Schachter and Rav Aryeh Lebowitz, director of the YU semicha program, in addition to more YU alumni. The chaburah is planned to meet 12 p.m. in Glueck 418.

Chaburot dedicated to religious conflicts in the workforce, previously offered annually during spring semesters, have not been held since the pandemic, and have been reintroduced by Mashgiach Ruchani Rabbi Beni Krohn and Rabbi Elisha Bacon, assistant dean of UTS.

Krohn stressed the advantages of having students meet with both Roshei Yeshiva

and alumni.

"The chaburah allows students to ask specific halachic questions to the Rebbeim and also hear practical tips from those doing it in real life," Krohn explained to The Commentator. "The goal is that the professionals will give phone numbers to the guys so they can keep asking questions later."

*"Sometimes it is only after we leave Yeshiva that we realize how much Yeshiva can offer us to prepare for when we leave."*

Rabbi Beni Krohn, Mashgiach Ruchani, UTS

Given the fact that the vast majority of students in YU enter the secular workforce, many YU Mashgichim feel that sessions like these are needed.

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## Joshua Meredith, Career Center Advisor & Adjunct Syms Professor, Leaves YU After 3 1/2 Years

By Sammy Intrator

Joshua Meredith, former director of career advising and technology at the Shevat Glaubach Center for Career Strategy and Professional Development, departed from Yeshiva University after three and half years on Dec. 23. In place of Meredith, Sharon Mella-Reyes has been promoted to Director of Career Strategy Advising.

Meredith is transitioning to a new role at Deloitte, a large business consulting company, as a client relationship executive in their New York State higher education division, where he will work with colleges and universities across New York.

Meredith started at Shevat Glaubach Center, formally known as the Career Center, in the summer of 2019 and began teaching a Sy Syms School of Business class called Ethical and Legal Environment of Business in the fall of 2020, which is required for all students to graduate from the business school. He announced his departure through an email to undergraduate students on Dec. 13.

In the email, Meredith thanked students for the years of appointments, expressed his enjoyment in providing advice to students and directed students seeking advice to other employees of the career center.

*"Dare to dream, think creatively and find something that is for you — not based on what someone else wants for you."*

Joshua Meredith

Meredith told The Commentator that his decision to leave was a "very difficult decision," and that he hopes students remember him as someone who cared about their growth.

"I hope that YU students will think of

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# FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

## Practical Workplace Halacha For YC

By **ARIEL KAHAN**

How would one characterize the relationship between the Torah aspect of Yeshiva University and everything else it offers? Torah Umadda? Torah U'mammon? Torah Uparnassah?

This question is at the forefront of much debate amongst YU students and faculty. In fact, several Commentator articles over the past few years have bemoaned YU's supposed lack of intellectual exploration in the classroom in favor of more career-driven initiatives, while others have defended YU's practical approach to educating its students.

I identify with both perspectives, and I think that is true of many YU students. On the one hand, there is an unbelievable intrinsic value in learning for the sake of learning. A traditional education is something that is to be cherished and valued for its own sake, and I think most of us feel that obtaining a classical and well-rounded educational experience is enriching and fulfilling. On the other hand, there is immense pressure to make a good living in our community and shaping a curriculum to achieve that goal and to appeal to students who are focused on their future career prospects is fully understandable.

However, not everything needs to be so black and white all the time. There can be some classes that do both. They can have the ability to satisfy a quest for knowledge as well as to provide valuable professional and life skills.

Practical Workplace Halacha is an example of such a class. While it may be more "practical" in intention, as it equips students with the skills to function as observant Jews in the workplace, it also offers intellectual pleasure and an opportunity to explore critical value judgments for observant Jews functioning in the broader world. Many YU students have mentioned this (to me or my peers) as a class that they would love to and be excited to take.

Unfortunately, not every YU student can take this class. Practical Workplace Halacha, which is a Sy Syms requirement, is restricted to Sy Syms students — but it should be required for YC students as well. And if not required, there is no excuse for it not to be offered as an elective.

Starting with the obvious. Students in YC are also going into the workplace. Will political science students who are aspiring lawyers or consultants never have to attend a business lunch in a non-kosher restaurant? Will computer science students not have to tell their bosses that they cannot work

on Shabbat or Chagim? This in and of itself is a reason to make Practical Workplace Halacha a YC requirement.

The shift from YU to the "real world" is drastic and is a thought that occupies the minds of many YU students. Many (perhaps most) students who have gone to YU come from similar backgrounds in which they have been fully educated in Orthodox institutions, and have rarely ventured into the secular world. They hear adults at the Shabbat table discussing stories and scenarios from work and wonder with curiosity, and perhaps some insecurity. They sit at their *makom* in Yeshiva and ponder what their life will look like when their *makom* turns into a desk in a workplace. YU students want answers and guidance and pay the money to get it.

*Would a true religious institution choose only to educate half of its students how to implement their religious observance in the workplace?*

YU prides itself on being the pre-eminent "flagship Jewish University." Operating under the Torah Umadda mantra and the Five Torot, one thing has always been its mission: that the lessons and values we learn from our Jewish studies should be taken out into the world.

This can only be accomplished if we are educated and trained in a way that provides this opportunity. The Judaic studies classes that non-Syms students are required to take, such as Bible or Jewish Philosophy, are of course important in developing a sophisticated understanding of Jewish thought and values, but they don't by themselves inform the undergraduate population on how to interact with the world at large. There are more fundamental, practical, halachic Jewish values that every Jewish young professional should be well informed on.

Of course, if this class is also required, it will make it harder for students to graduate from YU in three years. Students already work hard to finish YU on time, often overloading their semesters or even taking summer courses to achieve this goal; it is not ideal to add to the stress.

Nonetheless, the requirement of Practical Workplace Halacha is surely more important than many other classes that YC students are

required to take to graduate. While I am not saying it is easy, this class should be put in the place of one of the YC Secular CORE. Which one? I have plenty of suggestions. Alternatively, there are 12 credits required (for Jewish COREs), with at least one class required in Jewish Thought and Philosophy (JTP), Jewish History (JHI) and Bible (BIB). Even if one took each of these in three-credit courses, there would still be room for one more.

I am not questioning the importance of a strong classical education or demeaning the value of the YC CORE. Both of these things are important and provide students with opportunities to grow intellectually in college.

But YU is not any college. YU prides itself on being a flagship Jewish institution. Students stretch their bank accounts to pay for a unique experience catering to their needs as observant Jews. They are paying to have one CORE that they could have gotten at a secular college to be replaced with a class that can provide them with a service they will implement for the rest of their lives.

It is odd that YU has not jumped on the opportunity to offer this class to all students. After all, YU is spending a lot of time and money in court arguing that they are a religious institution. Would a true religious institution choose only to educate half of its students on how to implement their religious observance in the workplace?

Recently, there has been an initiative from Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) to give sessions during lunchtime on these topics. While this is highly commendable and important, four lunchtime sessions are not a substitute for a full semester of this course. First of all, many students have prior commitments during lunch, which could include shiur, meetings or personal obligations. Second, in terms of pure time, four days of one-hour sessions don't compare to 15 or so sessions of one and a half hours.

On behalf of the students of YC, we are looking for our prized institution to provide us with the guidance that we need as the future of Klal Yisroel.

## THE COMMENTATOR

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# YU Counseling Center & Active Minds Team Up to Encourage Students to Express Gratitude

By RIKI GREENBERG

The YU Counseling Center partnered with Active Minds, an undergraduate club devoted to mental health awareness, and the Undergraduate Torah Studies Program (UTS) to run a gratitude initiative on Dec. 21, during Chanukah, to encourage students to write about things they are grateful for.

Students were prompted to write one

thing they were grateful for on a post-it note on both the Wilf and Beren campuses, to be hung on boards along with other student responses. On Wilf campus, the initiative took place outside the Heights Lounge, and on Beren campus, in the lobby of 245 Lexington Ave.

On Wilf campus, Rabbi Avraham Kenner, a therapist at the Wilf Campus counseling center, and Matthew Silver (YC '24), a co-president of Active Minds, encouraged

students to post gratitude notes during the early afternoon of Dec. 21, offering students treats such as chocolate coins. On Beren Campus, Yael Berger (SCW '23), president of Active Minds, and Shira Silton of the Beren

*“Within hours, the canvases on both Wilf and Beren campuses were almost completely filled with gratitude statements, and the positive atmosphere around them was palpable.”*

Avraham Kener, therapist at YU Counseling Center

lights, miracles and the celebration of human triumph associated with Chanukah.”

The Counseling Center felt that the event was a success.

“The Counseling Center was delighted by the overwhelming response of the student body,” Kener told The Commentator. “Within hours, the canvases on both Wilf and Beren campuses were almost completely filled with gratitude statements, and the positive atmosphere around them was palpable.”

After the event, Berger told The Commentator that she felt the event was important, as gratitude is often overlooked.

“Gratitude is something that is so important yet can go so easily unrecognized,” said Berger. “Having students deliberately express gratitude increases mindfulness, reduces stress and improves overall mental well-being.”

The YU Counseling Center is a resource free of charge for students to take advantage of and meet with professional clinicians when they are experiencing stress of any kind. In the upcoming months, Active Minds will be running its annual event called Stomp out the Stigma, which promotes mental health and aims to eliminate the stigma around it on both campuses.

Counseling Center did the same, distributing donuts as well.

The boards remained up during the rest of Chanukah and students added further notes.

Silton, a senior therapist at the Beren Counseling Center, told the Commentator that the initiative was purposefully scheduled to take place on Chanukah.

“We thought it would be special,” said Silton, “to impart this gratitude concept to the student body while also celebrating the



The gratitude board in the lobby of 245 Lexington Ave

RIKI GREENBERG

## UTS CHABURA

Continued from Front Page

“Most of our Talmidim are going into the workplace which raises a lot of halachic questions and questions about Avodas Hashem in general, whether it be finding time to learn or maintaining a connection with a Rebbe” stated Krohn.

The Ben Torah in the Workplace Chabura is part of an overall effort by UTS to help prepare students for post-Yeshiva life. Rebbeim

and Mashgichim in YU are always available to advise students about these issues. In addition, there are specific courses YU offers on Halacha in the Workplace.

“Sometimes it is only after we leave Yeshiva that we realize how much Yeshiva can offer us to prepare for when we leave,” said Krohn. “This chaburah is just one example of that.”

## MEREDITH LEAVES

Continued from Front Page

me,” said Meredith, “[as] someone that was passionate about their development and learning.

“To my advisees, I hope they continue the work to reach their goals, and for those future lawyers that they complete the journey. For the students I taught over 5 semesters in the classroom, my hope is that they take the intensity of our classroom debates into the workplace.” Meredith also recalled fondly his time working under Dean Noam Wasserman and with Professor Moses Pava. He told The Commentator that one of his

fondest memories was students returning to campus in Fall 2021, and encouraged students to make use of the career center.

In his final words to the student body, Meredith told students that “YU is a great community” and that students should use all the “resources you have to make your journey!”

“Dare to dream, think creatively and find something that is for you — not based on what someone else wants for you,” said Meredith. “Finally, think differently — turn a problem on its head, and look at it through



Glueck Beis Midrash

SRULI FRIEDMAN



Joshua Meredith left Yeshiva University after three years this December

different lenses, it has been a strategy I have lived throughout my professional career and has done me well — try it.

“Thank you YU, the SGC team and the students for a great journey.”

Before coming to YU, Meredith, a native of Jericho, New York, graduated from Syracuse University College of Law, practiced as a litigator for over three years, and worked at Georgetown University in multiple roles between 2013–2019.

# Union Protests YU’s Decision to Hire Asbestos Removal Contractor

By SRULI FRIEDMAN

About five demonstrators affiliated with the Laborers’ International Union of North America (LiUNA) organized protests at Wilf Campus on Jan. 11 and 12, condemning YU’s decision to hire Green Island Group Corp. to perform asbestos removal in Belfer Hall over winter break.

The protesters, who set up two giant inflatable rats outside Belfer and Rubin Halls early both mornings before leaving during the afternoon, distributed fliers accusing YU of acting inconsistently with its “core Torah values” by doing business with Green Island Group Corp., which it accused of performing “deadly asbestos work” and refusing to “pay

their workers proper area standard wages,” encouraging students to contact Yeshiva University President Ari Berman and the main office to complain.

“The contractor named by the protester has been utilizing union labor on this project,” Chief Facilities and Administrative Officer Randy Apfelbaum told The Commentator. “The union apparently had a dispute with the contractor related to other projects that were performed in the past — not related to the work at YU. As such, we were able to persuade the union protesters to leave.”

Neither LiUNA nor Green Island Group got back to The Commentator’s requests for comment.

Many students expressed their surprise at waking up to the spectacle.

“The sight of a giant rat first thing in the

morning was utterly shocking,” remarked Rami Levin (SSSB '24). “It was absolutely jarring. I wasn’t entirely sure I was awake. I felt nervous and overall out of it.”

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that became a popular building material in the 19th and 20th centuries due to its fire resistance and effectiveness as an electric insulator. However, inhaling it can have a damaging impact on health, and the material is considered carcinogenic. Construction companies began phasing out the use of asbestos in the 1970s as its dangerous effects became more widely known.



Protestors set up giant inflatable rats on Wilf

ELISHAMA MARMON

## Sens. Schumer and Gillibrand Secure \$1.5 Million in Funds for Lampport Auditorium Renovations

By JONATHAN LEVIN

New York Sens. Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand secured \$1.5 million of federal funding for renovations of the Nathan Lampport Auditorium on Wilf Campus this December.

The funds are from an appropriations package included in the Fiscal Year 2023 omnibus bill and will be used to improve user experience and for renovations of historical parts of the room, which are beginning to deteriorate due to age.

"The project," Jon Greenfield, YU's director of government relations, told The Commentator, "is expected to include the installation of new air-conditioning, upgrades to lighting, acoustics and audiovisual capacity, and the restoration of the stained-glass windows and ceiling."

The auditorium was built in 1928 and is housed in Zysman Hall, built in the same year and home to Yeshiva University High School for Boys and some Undergraduate Torah Studies shiurim. The auditorium's architecture emphasizes the art deco style, popular in the 1920s, as well as the Moorish style, also popular in the '20s, to a lesser extent. This is the opposite of the facade of Zysman, which puts a greater emphasis on Moorish style than art deco style. The auditorium can seat nearly 1000 people.

The funding that Schumer and Gillibrand secured was included in the FY 2023 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) appropriations bill, which was signed into law as part of the FY 2023 federal omnibus bill by President Biden on Dec. 29.

While it is not clear when the auditorium was last renovated, nearly everything inside, including the seating, chandeliers,

and large clock, is original to its construction nearly a century ago. Recent renovations to Zysman in 2017 did not include the Lampport Auditorium.

The university has yet to announce when renovations are expected to begin, as the project is currently in its planning stages.

"I'll continue fighting for the federal resources to support Yeshiva University, its faculty and staff, students and the broader community," he added.

Yeshiva University is grateful for both senators' support, Greenfield told The Commentator.

continues to serve as a gathering place for generations to come."

Lampport Hall, designed by architect Charles Meyers, has hosted many YU events over the years. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rosh Yeshiva of Rabbi Issac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) from 1941-'85, used to give a yearly speech in Lampport on his father's *yahrzeit*, and the room was once used for YU's undergraduate graduation ceremonies. YU has also hosted world leaders there, as well as Rep. Adriano Espaillat's local swearing-in ceremony in 2017.

In the past year, the space has been used for university events like Stomp out the Stigma, graduation ceremonies for some of the institution's graduate schools, an Israeli-Independence day ceremony and for the inaugural event of the Sacks-Herstein Center.

*"I am proud to have secured this funding for Yeshiva University to modernize Lampport Auditorium with cutting-edge technology and restore its historic architecture."*

Charles Schumer, Senate Majority Leader

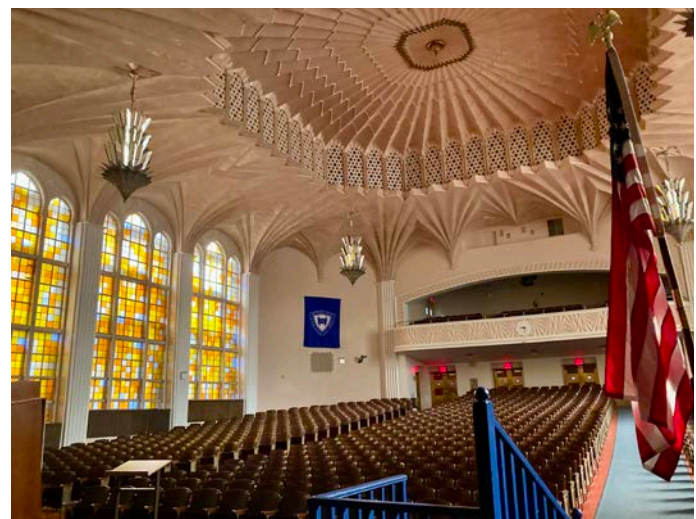
Both Gillibrand and Schumer told The Commentator that they were proud to get the funds for the renovations.

"I'm proud to have brought Yeshiva University this investment that I fought hard to secure," said Gillibrand. "These funds will help restore Yeshiva University's Lampport Auditorium, which will allow the school to continue hosting premier cultural events for its students and the surrounding community as well as provide a critical gathering and activities space."

Schumer told The Commentator that he felt similarly.

"I am proud to have secured this funding for Yeshiva University to modernize Lampport Auditorium with cutting-edge technology and restore its historic architecture," said Schumer. "Lampport Auditorium is a piece of New York's Jewish history and its restoration and modernization will enable many more decades of hosting cultural figures, dignitaries and local community events important to the Washington Heights community."

"We are thankful to Senators Schumer and Gillibrand for their steadfast support in securing funding," said Greenfield, "which will ensure this historic auditorium



The Nathan Lampport Auditorium on Wilf Campus will be renovated with a \$1.5 million grant secured by Sens. Schumer and Gillibrand

## Residence Life Opens 'Living Room,' a Redesigned Lounge for Shabbat

By JONATHAN LEVIN

The "Living Room," a redesigned lounge in Morgenstern Residence Hall meant for use by students on Shabbat and Motzei Shabbat, was opened on Jan. 20, the first Shabbat of the Spring 2023 semester.

The Lucile and Sidney Burdick Lounge, located in the basement of Morgenstern Residence Hall, was renovated by the Office of University Housing and Residence Life over intersession, redesigned and stocked with games and books.

"We opened a newly renovated 'Living Room' in the Burdick Lounge on the basement level of Morgenstern Hall," Office of

University Housing and Residence Life Director Avi Feder told The Commentator. "The existing lounge has been updated with new furniture, carpeting, and lighting, and stocked with books and games to create an inviting space for our residents to spend time on Shabbat."

The idea to redesign the lounge, which was mostly unused, came from a group of resident advisors last semester, with the aim of making Shabbat at Wilf Campus more welcoming for students.

"We also have been continuously focusing on improving the experience of Shabbat on campus," said Feder, "so the addition of a 'living room' space for use on Shabbat and Motzei Shabbat felt like a great way to make

the Wilf Campus a more comfortable environment for students who call YU home."

The renovations, funded by the Office of University Housing and Residence Life and designed with student input, were conducted with head RA Eitan Maron (YC '23) overseeing efforts.

In the lounge, the Office of University Housing and Residence Life replaced an old pool table with a new foosball table, added velvet and net chairs, three carpets, light fixtures, strip lights, board games, books, newspapers and a Nintendo Switch with two multiplayer games for use on Motzei Shabbat. The room, which is locked during the week, is open Friday night until midnight Sunday, and also hosts an RA *oneg Shabbos* after the Friday night meal.

The lounge was originally dedicated by Theresa Felson in 1965 in memory of her son-in-law and daughter, who perished in a 1963 plane crash in Lima, Peru.

Jean Burdick, Lucile and Sidney's niece, who previously donated artwork in their memory, told The Commentator that she was pleased with the renovations.

"I think the updated lounge is very appealing and will be a good resource for students to be used on Shabbat," said Burdick. "I am so glad that Yeshiva continues to have the space used for students to enhance their experience at your university."

Some students on campus, including Ben Bruder (YC '24), told The Commentator that they thought that a dedicated Shabbat game room was good for students.

"It's nice to have an actual Shabbos game room on campus," said Bruder, "besides for just a few board games in the lobbies and the Muss ping-pong table, which always seems to be missing things."

*"I think the updated lounge is very appealing and will be a good resource for students to be used on Shabbat. I am so glad that Yeshiva continues to have the space used for students to enhance their experience at your university."*

Jean Burdick

The "Living Room" is part of increased Shabbat programming from The Office of University Housing and Residence Life aimed at improving the Shabbat experience on campus. To this end, the department is also introducing a "Heights Tour," where RA's will give a "guided walk" to students in the neighborhood adjacent to Wilf Campus.



The Lucile and Sidney Burdick Lounge, first dedicated in 1965, was renovated and turned into a special Shabbat game lounge

EITAN MARON / OFFICE OF RESIDENCE LIFE

## February News Brief: Sky Caf Reopening and COVID-19 Policy Change

By DOV PFEIFFER

### Sky Caf Reopens

After having been closed during the fall semester due to staffing shortages, the Sky Cafe reopened for lunch availability on Jan. 18.

The Sky Cafe, located on the 12th floor of Belfer Hall, will be open between 11:30 a.m. and 2 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays. Food options available include fruit, salads, sandwiches and snacks.

“With a variety of prepacked options, The Sky Café is an ideal place to pick up lunch on the run. There is even a variety of meat items to choose from,” Samuel Chasan, director of Dining Services at Yeshiva University, told The Commentator.

The Sky Cafe had previously reopened following its shutdown due to COVID on

Feb. 7th, 2022, as was sent out in an email at the time, before not reopening at the start of the Fall 2022 semester.

The Sky Cafe is the only cafeteria on Wilf Campus that sells ready-made meat products at lunch.

### COVID-19 Policy Change

YU’s COVID-19 response team announced updated COVID-19 policies on Jan. 17, including that students should isolate in their dorm room in the event they test positive for COVID-19.

Students who are isolating, the email stated, should stay away from others as much as possible, wear a mask in the room, and keep windows open to allow ventilation. Students should also mask and social distance when using a communal restroom.

When isolating, students should obtain their own food or request others bring it up

for them.

While not mentioned by the email, students who are isolating can get food delivered to them by the Bikur Cholim Brigade, a student-run initiative that delivers meals and care packages to sick students.

YU suspended on-campus COVID-19 testing last May and has not required or offered testing since. YU stated in the email that the most recent update was in line with CDC guidance and the policies of other New York City universities.



View of Sky Caf (left), illustrations of COVID-19 (right)

THE COMMENTATOR, CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL

## YU Partners Up with Insurance Company to Offer Insurance to Students

By JONATHAN FELMAN

Students residing in university housing can now enroll in renter’s insurance, courtesy of a new partnership formed with GradGuard, The Office of University Housing and Residence Life told undergraduate students on Jan. 11.

The insurance policy covers everything from phones and computers to textbooks and bicycles. GradGuard offers plans for those living on campus, as well as those living off campus, and students can enroll whenever they want, including in the middle

*“Offering it to our students is in line with a trend which many Yeshivos and hundreds of universities similar to YU have been following.”*

Avi Feder, director of YU’s Office of University Housing and Residence Life

of a semester. Besides traditional insurance options, students can also purchase tuition insurance, which can protect up to all of a student’s tuition for a semester if they have to withdraw due to medical reasons.

Although no specific event prompted YU to begin offering renter’s insurance, Director of Residence Life Avi Feder said that YU pursued this partnership since “offering it to our students is in line with a trend which many Yeshivos and hundreds of universities similar to YU have been following.”

Feder told The Commentator that the university chose GradGuard due to their strong reputation, competitive pricing and

comprehensive services.

To enroll, students can go to GradGuard’s dedicated YU page on their website and follow the prompts. Students can choose their own property coverage, liability coverage, and their deductible. The process takes only a few minutes, and insurance quotes run as low as \$13.28 a month.

## Mendel Gottesman Library Holds Ceremony Recognizing Donation of Early American Newspapers

By HANNAH MAMET

The Mendel Gottesman Library recently held a ceremony recognizing a donation of 350 American newspaper clippings from 1734 through 1869 that contain insights into Jewish life between the Colonial and Civil War eras.

The dedication ceremony for the collection, donated by former Professor David Rubin of Borough of Manhattan Community College shortly before the pandemic, was delayed due to the global health crisis and only held Dec. 11. Rubin had accumulated these selections while researching his 2019 book, “Strangers & Natives: A Newspaper Narrative of Early Jewish America 1734–1869.”

At the event, Shulamith Berger, curator of special collections at the Mendel Gottesman Library, explained how these items provide unique perspectives on early Jewish communities in America.

“One of the highlights of these primary sources is the immediacy of the information for both researchers and students,” said Berger. “Observers will read these

documents in the way a contemporary would have read it, and it places the Jewish material directly in the context of American life and the happenings of general society.”

*“Observers will read these documents in the way a contemporary would have read it, and it places the Jewish material directly in the context of American life and the happenings of general society.”*

Shulamith Berger, curator of special collections at the Mendel Gottesman Library

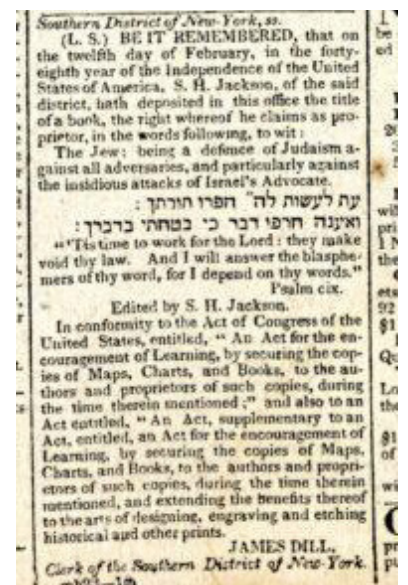
The collection, among many things, includes an article from 1790 detailing correspondence between American President George Washington and the Newport Hebrew Congregation, and an 1853 feature describing services held by Manhattan’s Congregation Rodeph Shalom at their original location in the Lower East Side, which is currently owned by the Congregation

Chasam Sofer.

Rubin, a patron of YU since 2008, has donated over a hundred artifacts from across historical eras, including a Mikraot Gedolot

dating to 17th century Basel, Switzerland, which was commissioned by the Christian Hebraist Johannes Buxtorf. YU previously honored Rubin for his numerous contributions to the library’s collections and to the scholarship of American Jewry in 2012.

The collection is kept in the rare book room on the 4th floor; students can access it by submitting a request to archives@yu.edu.



An 1823 copyright notice, one of the earliest uses of Hebrew print in an American paper

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

# Ripples of Excitement and Currents of Dissatisfaction: The Early History of the Gottesman Pool

By DOV PFEIFFER

Little justification is really needed to write about the Benjamin Gottesman Pool. As long as students continue to frequent the Beren and Wilf campuses, it is quite likely that any complaint from a Wilf student to a Beren student about the amenities on Wilf will be met with the indignant response of “You have a pool!” As such, it seems worthwhile to look at the process that brought the pool into being.

While planning for a pool had begun as early as 1983, the Gottesman Pool first entered the public scene in 1986. This may not have been the first attempt at a pool as there have long been rumors, which continue to the present day, that the gym in the basement of the MTA building was initially meant to be a pool. These rumors may have confirmation from a special edition of *The Commentator* published Dec. 15, 1982, which reports the planning of the Max Stern Athletic Center. There, an explanation for why the current MTA gymnasium was insufficient has the following passing comment: “But what we called a gym, one administrator recalled ‘was never supposed to be a gym. It was supposed to be a swimming pool.’” Around this time, the idea of an on campus pool had gained some traction after members of the YC swimming class were accosted on their way to the gym YU had rented out. An editorial in the Nov. 1983 issue of *The Commentator* called on the administration to build a pool in addition to the athletic center.

Thus, on Dec. 10, 1986, *The Commentator* reported on plans to build a pool, which had become public knowledge after being announced by the Office of the President. The funding was to come from private donors, not named in the article, though, as the article notes, this would not take into account pool upkeep costs the university would incur from that point on. It was also noted that women from Stern College would not be allowed to use it, after opposition from *roshei yeshiva*. The article explained the reasoning: “Rabbi Tendler was quick to point out that there is no halachic problem involved with the use of the pool by women, provided separate hours were maintained. The issue at hand would be one of ‘form’. Apparently it would distract from the Yeshiva atmosphere if once or twice a week a bus full of women were to appear on campus, towel and swimsuit in hand.”

Following this announcement students had a long time to reflect on the pool, as pool plans were not finalized until early November 1988, as reported in the Nov. 22, 1988 *Commentator*, because of funding and design concerns. That article estimated between a year and eighteen months for the pool to be completed. It would finish in time for the beginning of the fall 1991 school semester. For all the strength and vigor that

would characterize the responses to this new expenditure, it is interesting to note with the benefit of hindsight that, barring exceptional circumstances, all the students who would be excited for or upset by the new uptown pool would graduate before any YC student could dip their toes into it. Student responses can be roughly divided into three categories, namely, excitement for the pool, critique of pool funding as better allocated elsewhere and critique of women being excluded.

Starting with the first, the Sept. 8, 1988 *Commentator* lists the planned pool as one of many factors producing high quality of student life. Similarly, in the Feb. 18, 1987 *Commentator*, then-new Athletics Director Dr. Julius Shelvin saw the pool as a valuable addition to the uptown campus. The critique of women being excluded is also fairly straightforward. The Nov. 30, 1988 *Observer* editorial described that “some Stern women responded angrily, claiming that SCW should be able to use the pool on certain days.” The editorial proceeded to sketch out plausible methods for female students to gain pool access, be it uptown or elsewhere.

Easily the most common and most complex expressed reaction criticizes the amount of funding devoted to a pool when other points were of much greater need. The Dec. 24, 1986 *Observer* editorial states it is not begrudging the men's pool, rather requesting the administration be attentive to Stern students' desires for improvements on their campus. A petition for library improvements with around 150 signatures could be found on the following page. The outcry here was ultimately successful. The Feb. 18, 1987 *Observer* reported on library renovations undertaken, saying, “The changes in the administration's attitude has come after a semester of uproar within Stern's student body. The student's outrage over the poorly equipped library and sports facilities seemed to come in response to the proposed pool to be built on the uptown campus.” An editorial from that issue also referenced that air of student unrest, and thanked the administration for responding to it with improvement. A similar, retrospective, sentiment is found in a Sep. 22, 1987 *Observer* article titled “Separate — But Equal?” which noted the lack of attention to needs in Stern, wondering aloud if Stern College was viewed as an equal partner to Yeshiva College under the Yeshiva University umbrella.

In that same issue, another funding-related critique was raised. At that time, many of the university workers had threatened to strike based on low pay. The other *Observer* editorial in that issue tacitly supported the workers' cause and asked for a compromise to be reached. In a news article about the situation, Laverne Weekes, the union organizer and one of the chief union negotiators stated, “Listen to how they say they really don't give a damn — they're going to build a swimming pool uptown.” In a different

article in that issue looking at student opinions on a worker protest, one student took the opportunity to swipe at the pool saying that if the workers complaints were valid, they should be paid, but not through a tuition hike. Instead, “[l]et them take the money out of other things, like making the pool a little bit smaller, for instance.”

Another critique of the pool, closely related to the former, related to teacher pay. In the April 8, 1987 *Observer*, a full-page article discussed the paltry pay of professors, a situation that had led to a Supreme Court case a short while prior. The article criticized many aspects of teacher treatment, including low pension funds and the expectation for professors to give courses on very different subjects. Thus, given the context, it should come as no surprise that Prof. Lauren T. Hatvary, chairperson of the Faculty Welfare Committee, took the opportunity to take a shot at the pool: “What troubles me is that no one wants to contribute money for faculty raises. After all, what is intrinsically more important — a university's faculty or a pool?” Among letters to the editor in the next *Observer* affirming Hatvary's claims, one includes the line, “One can have a college without swimming pools, fancy bricks in the sidewalk ... One can not have a college without teachers. For some strange reason, YU has attended first to all the luxuries and ignored the one necessity.” Additionally, in a reference likely meant critically in this context, Prof. Will Lee, in an article about which he indicated his plan to write in one of those aforementioned letters, seemed to encourage donors to fund departments instead of just amenities like pools.

Over time, this chatter died down, and eventually, construction began in late April 1990, and the pool was completed a year and a half later, in time for the start of the 1991 fall semester. As time passed, the particular circumstances that brought the pool into being and the reasoning behind its policies became muddled. Nevertheless, its status as a beacon for discontent with YU spending has not ceased.

## Before Built:

### Plans:

- Dec. 10, 1986 - pool plans proceed (Commie)
- Oct. 25, 1988 - pool delayed (Commie)
- Nov. 22, 1988 - pool plans finalized (Commie)
- May 9, 1989 - pool still not built (Commie)
- Sept 21, 1989 - pool still, still not built (Commie)

### Pool be Cool:

- Sept. 8, 1988 - pool be cool (Commie)

### Women Excluded:

- Sept. 22, 1987 - Separate But Equal? (Observer)

- Nov. 30, 1988 - Editorial for women use (Observer)

### Money Issues:

- Dec. 24, 1986 - Fund faculty and Library (Observer)
- Feb. 18, 1987 - Fund library (Observer)
- April 8, 1987 - Fund faculty (Observer)
- May 12, 1987 - Fund faculty (Observer)
- Oct. 29, 1987 - Fund faculty (Commie)
- May 5, 1988 - Fund library (Observer)

### Upon Completion:

#### News:

- Sept. 18, 1990 - Pool dedicated, final cost estimate (Commie)
- May 5, 1990 - Construction Begins (Commie)
- Oct. 23, 1991 - Pool Completed (Commie)

#### Responses:

- Dec. 21, 1990 - Weird equation of pool and dormitory (Commie)
- Oct. 29, 1991 - bunch of complaints and letters (Observer)
- Nov. 6, 1991 - critique of arbitrary policies (Commie)
- Dec. 18, 1991 - ignored petition (Observer)

#### More Recent Articles and Proposals:

- May 21, 1996 - backhand note about no pool (Observer)
- Apr. 6, 1998 - Women's athletics funding; Advice for the Stern Women (Observer)
- March 2005 - Women's Athletics Funding (Observer)
- Jan. 2008 - Women hours proposal (Observer)

#### Other:

- Dec. 21, 1999 - renting alt. pool (Observer)



Gottesman Pool YESHIVA UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS

## Before the Bookcases: The People and Process Which Produce The Seforim Sale

By DOV PFEIFFER

Over winter break, the empty expanses of Weissberg Commons began to blossom. Branches of tables and leaves of bookshelves covered the previously barren space. As the spring semester began, stacks of books, at first barely visible from afar, emerged into sight. And so, this year like almost every other, The Seforim Sale slowly awoke from hibernation.

The Seforim Sale is an annual book sale, billed as the largest Jewish book sale in North America, which has an inventory of tens of thousands of books and attracts thousands of customers. In addition to selling books, The Seforim Sale also hosts events — this year's sale having the meet ever — such as a discussion between Rabbi Ezra Schwartz and Rabbanit Chana Henkin about being forthright about *halakha*. The planning and organizing for the event are primarily run by the Yeshiva University

undergraduate students.

While customers who only see the fully stocked sale may not realize it, assembling The Seforim Sale is no simple endeavor, and it takes the hard work and dedication of many staff members to bring the sale into fruition. I personally have been working as a section manager, and I would like to focus on those whose efforts transform a large empty room into The Seforim Sale.

Preparation for The Seforim Sale began long before even the shelves and tables were

in place. Moshe Nasser (SSSB '24), CEO of The Seforim Sale, told me that his work for the sale started last April, with recruiting head staff. He also began to work on his vision for the sale then.

While his job as CEO is demanding, and the work required only increased as opening day approached, Nasser never felt alone in the process. He expressed great appreciation for all the staff working there, telling

*Continued on Page 7*

**SEFORIM SALE**  
*Continued from Page 6*

me they are what makes the job enjoyable. “The staff makes it as easy as possible to put it all together,” he added.

Nasser has also received support from past CEOs. He referred to the community of CEOs as a brotherhood, and shared that their advice helped him take the reins of The Seforim Sale. He told me he has “reached out to CEOs who graduated years ago for advice for how to make the sale as successful as possible, which made the learning curve a lot easier.”

Nasser stressed the uniqueness of The Seforim Sale, describing it as “a unique experience in the community that you can’t find anywhere else across the world.”

Executive Vice President of Operations Jordan Stebbins (YC ‘24) described to me the ordering process. He and the ordering team started work for The Seforim Sale in early September, and have been working continuously since. They are responsible for contacting vendors, determining what and how many of each title they want to order, and ensuring that all the books arrive and are labeled properly. This year’s sale contains over 140 vendors, the most in The Seforim Sale’s history. They range from large publishers like Artsroll or Koren, to individuals who bring their own books to be sold. Students involved make a significant commitment to the sale. “There are some people on the team who have put in more hours to The Seforim Sale in a week than they ever would for a full time job,” Stebbins said.

Stebbins sees two primary aspects of The Seforim Sale as standing out. “First, it functions as a massive *seforim* store for the Jewish community, where they can purchase almost any *sefer* at great prices. Additionally, the sale functions as the largest fully student-run operation at YU, and is one of the only opportunities YU students can get to fully run a business while still in undergrad.”

Later, during winter break, the first phase of physical setup began, as most of the head staff and a few volunteers from general staff started receiving deliveries, unpacking and labeling books and filling shelves.

Avraham Walkenfeld (WSSW ‘25) works as one of the two heads of backend, which entails overseeing employees to ensure prompt filling of online orders and inventory management. He shared his view of The Seforim Sale’s value: “It shows what Torah Umadda is to both the broader public and to ourselves, that we can combine research with *sifrei Achronim* and cookbooks; that we can have a student populace educated and God-fearing that also serves the greater world.”

Adira Kahn (SCW ‘23) serves as one of three head cashiers, a job that entails overseeing the checkout area and being available for questions. Alternatively, in her words, “most importantly my job is to carry a walkie-talkie and look official.” She shared, “I think it’s so incredible that The Seforim Sale is a place that everyone can go to and be able to find something that reflects their own way of connecting with Hashem ... it’s so inspiring to look around the sale and see a ton of people, each getting excited about their own things in the various sections of the sale, and then walking out with a new piece of Torah to learn.”

When spring semester began, the general staff joined in, and preparation kicked into high gear. With the combined contributions of many hands, we were able to fully unpack, label and sort even larger shipments in a relatively short time.

During this period, I asked a few other general staff what drew them to The Seforim Sale. Brandon Melamed (YC ‘25) shared, “I joined the sale because I wanted to be more involved in university culture and thought having the opportunity to help spread Torah would be a great way to do that.” Yedidya Schechter (YC ‘24) connected his joining

the sale to his high school experience: “The Seforim Sale is a big production that I was able to witness through my years in high school and I had always hoped to one day work there.” Tehila Bitton (SCW ‘24) described the value of both the community of

the Orthodox community, reminding us of the roots we share. During setup, I’ve worked alongside people with differing worldviews, and the rustle of healthy debate has at times breezed in the background. Yet, we all, from our differing perspectives, were united by a

*“It’s so inspiring to look around the sale and see a ton of people, each getting excited about their own things in the various sections of the sale, and then walking out with a new piece of Torah to learn.”*

Adira Kahn (SCW ‘23)

those who work for the sale and the value of facilitating learning, “To witness young students who are passionate about Tora learning, and helping others find the tools they need to learn, is a beautiful and inspiring thing.” Alayna Higdon (SCW ‘24) summarized succinctly, saying she signed up for “good vibes, fun people and lots of *sefarim*.”

They also highlighted the importance of The Seforim Sale to the Yeshiva University and broader Orthodox communities. Higdon described the value of the sale spreading Torah to people with all sorts of interests, and of creating a sense of community in YU. Schechter described his awe at being able to make thousands of Jewish books available to a broad public: “The ability to help out others in our community at large is humbling,” he said.

Finally, in a process that culminated late at night the Motzei Shabbos before the sale, books were set up on the shelves and tables to be sold, and the simple tidiness of the completed sale hid the effort that went into preparing it.

I’d like to end with what the Seforim Sale means to me: a potential source of unity for

joint purpose. As Bitton shared, “There is amazing banter constantly, as well as intellectual and *hashkafic* conversations and passionate debates. It is such a wonderful time to make friends and get to know like-minded individuals.”



The Seforim Sale YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

FROM THE COMMIE ARCHIVES

**(May 20, 2003; Volume 67, Issue 12) — The Big Three of the NBA Draft**

By DAVID EPSTEIN

*Editor’s Note: As LeBron James rapidly approaches the all time NBA scoring record, currently held by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, The Commentator has chosen to reprint a pre draft profile of the top prospects for the 2003 NBA draft.*

This year’s NBA draft is little more than a crapshoot. To avoid a possible age cap that may be implemented in 2004 many high school players and young foreigners are rushing to enter. On top of that, this year’s crop of NCAA players is among the weakest in history. The result is that General Managers are scrambling to find the players who will make the most immediate impact, as teams are forced to draft most players solely on potential.

GMs are salivating about the possibility of a top-three pick, knowing they can’t go wrong with LeBron, Darko, or Carmelo, a trip that may comprise the best top-three in the draft’s history. Fans already know these players on a first-name basis, a condition that gives instant marketability and great publicity to the team that drafts any of them. Carmelo and LeBron have gained not only the adulation of the fans but the attention of sneaker companies that are waiting to throw millions at the two players before either one has played an NBA game.

His unusual assortment of skills, size, and hype makes LeBron James the consen-

sus number-one pick and all but assured packed houses and many national television appearances for his team. At 6’8”, 240, and only 18 years of age, LeBron’s ceiling is so high that many think he will become the next Kobe or T-Mac and dominate the league for years to come.

Darko Milicic is a 17-year old, 7-footer from Yugoslavia, who has drawn comparisons to Dirk Nowitzmu. Though few Americans have seen him play in person, the word is that Darko can handle, shoot the three, take it inside, and D up. He is also supposedly very aggressive. Predictions are that when he grows into his body he will dominate the league. His competitiveness and nastiness are unlike the stereotypical demeanor of foreign players, and have vaulted him to his status as the probable number-two pick of this year’s draft. Whether he’s the next Dirk Nowitzki or Frederic Weiss remains to be seen, but many GMs are willing to take that chance on this 17-year old.

Carmelo Anthony will turn 19 a month before the draft after coming off what might have been the best season ever from a college freshman. He took the unranked Syracuse Orange all the way to the National Championship; they may not have even made the field of 64 without him. He carried them on his shoulders earning Final Four MVP honors. He is a scorer who can shoot, pass, handle, and an excellent rebounder at only 6’8”, 220. The consensus number-three pick has charisma and

game, and all the makings of a star for years to come.

Each of these players seems a sure bet to dominate the league for the next twenty years or so; the difficulty is choosing which star to take. LeBron and Carmelo are more marketable than Darko, and will bring in more revenue at the gates. During the Final Four weekend, many were saying that Carmelo should go number one, ahead of LeBron. While LeBron was dominating high school kids, many of whom will never play Division I ball, Carmelo was a man among boys against the best collegiate athletes in the country. People on LeBron’s bandwagon respond that if LeBron had been on Syracuse the Orangemen would have beaten Kansas by a wider margin.

The first meeting of the two stars, which may have been the first of many, came on February 20, 2002. LeBron’s Ohio school, St. Vincent-St. Mary, played Carmelo’s Oak Hill Academy of Virginia in the Prime Time Shootout. Oak Hill Academy, featuring eight DI players, defeated St. Vincent-St. Mary 72-66. The two players combined for half the game’s points. Carmelo finished with 34 points and 11 rebounds; LeBron had 36 and 9, taking home the game’s MVP award. Oak Hill was number one in the country for most of that year. LeBron has done for his team what ‘Meli did for Syracuse this year, taking the team in his back and carrying this group of no-namers to three consecutive state championships (even with this exposure, his teammates

were not recruited to play for DI teams). That game showed that they are both great players and stars in the making. NBA teams should be happy with either one.

The league’s salary cap for a maximum three-year contract for rookies means that the real bidding will start three years from now when they become free agents. They will become superstars for the rams that sign them, not necessarily the teams that draft them. Everyone is dating based on what these players will be at 25, not what they are now at 17, 18, and 19 respectively.

The NBA is a business, and if these three reach their potential, they will probably do so for the Lakers, Knicks, or any other team that throws money at them. The Nuggets, Cavs, and whichever lucky team gets into the lottery should pick based on what’s going to help the team now. That’s LeBron and Carmelo at one and two because those are the players who will bring exposure and cash. Orlando threw all that money at Tracy McGrady even before he was a proven starter, and he turned into one of the best players in the league. LeBron, Carmelo and Darko have what it takes to be the next Tracy McGrady or Jermaine O’Neal, but like them, these three will probably do their damage for a different team than the one drafting them. NBA GMs should take the player who is best for them now, not the one going to be better at 25. At 25, he may be on another team.

## The Ghost of *Torah UMadda*: English Literature at YU

By RABBI YITZCHAK BLAU

I entered Yeshiva College in 1987 with the advantage of knowing I wanted to be an educator and not having to worry about a GPA necessary for graduate school; thus, I could happily take the most demanding and rewarding courses. Furthermore, the ideology of my shiur rebbe in Israel, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l, very much resonated with me. R. Lichtenstein was the most articulate spokesperson for the religious benefits of a good humanistic education.

The explicitly systematic discussions of Gentile thinkers often reveal to us the hidden wealth implicit in our writings. The Gentiles, furthermore, have their own wisdom, even of a moral and philosophical nature. Who can fail to be inspired by the ethical idealism of Plato, the passionate fervor of Augustine, or the visionary grandeur of Milton? Who can remain unenlightened by the lucidity of Aristotle, the profundity of Shakespeare, or the incisiveness of Newman? ...To deny that many fields have been better cultivated by non-Jewish than by Jewish writers is to be stubbornly and unnecessarily chauvinistic. There is nothing in our medieval poetry to ri-

val Dante and nothing in our modern literature to compare with Kant and we would do well to admit it. We have our own genius and we have bent it to the noblest of pursuits, the development of Torah. But we cannot be expected to do everything. (Leaves of Faith I:94)

*However, a look at the course catalog for the YC English department for the Spring 2023 semester indicates how things have changed since my time there.*

My own life experience confirmed this position and I was fortunate to have two outstanding teachers, Rabbi Shalom Carmy and Dr. Will Lee, who exposed me to the classics of the western canon. I took Dr. Lee six times which included courses in Victorian Literature (Carlyle, Arnold, Browning, etc.), Modern Poetry (Whitman, Dickinson, Frost, Yeats, Eliot) and two survey courses (Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Donne, Dryden, Pope). In addition, I took an excellent course in Romantic Poetry (Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats) with Judith Rosen and a Milton course with Manfred Weidhorn. The classics we read paid ample dividends.

Now I will not over-romanticize and say that all English majors came with

such idealistic motivations. One group simply sought a high GPA on the road to law school. However, I had enough like-minded friends (Chanoch Waxman, David Glatt, Ronnie Ziegler, Dov Fogel, Benjie Samuels) to ensure that the classroom discussion was invariably of a strong caliber.

In the more than thirty years since my graduation, I have continued to draw insight and inspiration from the great works of literature. Wordsworth's poem on the benefits of structure and limitation ("Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room"), Victor Hugo's depiction of Jean Valjean endangering himself by returning to save an innocent man despite many obstacles on the way, Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov preferring to "return the ticket" rather than having one child suffer are only a small sample of the plots, scenes and lines that continue to animate my thinking. The closing lines of George Eliot's "Middlemarch" offer another excellent example.

For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

I convey this passion for literature to my students and some have even chosen to study the humanities at YU. However, a look at the course catalog for the YC English department for the Spring 2023 semester indicates how things have changed since my time there. Oddly enough for a small department, there is one course titled "Literary Hauntings: Hamlet to Henry James" and another called "The Monstrous." With all due respect to Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley, I do not think enough great literature exists in this genre for one course, let alone two. Furthermore, an intense focus on the ghost scenes in Hamlet diverts attention from the play's best features.

An emphasis on movies is even more paramount. Three courses have "film" in the title (Approaches to Film, Books on Books Films on Films and Face to Face: Complex Modern Identities in Contemporary Film). Another three incorporate movies in the curriculum (Spoiler Alert:

Modern Storytelling Across Genre, Diaspora Literature and Parisian Views). No classes exist focusing exclusively on the great works of the Western canon. Even if one finds the study of movies incredibly absorbing and deep, the lack of balance is striking.

I would like to preemptively counter three potential defenses of this semester's menu. Interest in the humanities has declined across the entire Western World and English departments do what they can to increase attractiveness and stay afloat. At YU, this argument fails. I know several Orayta and Gush graduates eager to study the classics in depth and I imagine that other yeshivot must produce at least some similarly minded fellows. The current offerings actually scare these students away from English classes.

Perhaps some will argue that analysis of modern media such as television and movies proves just as insightful and rewarding as Samuel Johnson and Leo Tolstoy. I categorically deny this (see my article "Modern Orthodox Arguments against Television" in "Tradition" 44:2 Summer 2011). But even if true, surely some courses should be available for those who do prefer Shakespeare. It is, after all, an English Department and not Media Studies.

It may be that course selection reflects the expertise of the given professors; indeed, instructors should teach what they know well and are passionate about. If so, the department clearly needs another voice. The simplest starting point would be to ask Will Lee to come back and teach a course each semester. Double the standard salary or find some other incentive if need be, but convince him to return and fill a gaping educational hole.

In the past two years, I have now written criticisms of YC moving Hebrew classes online, of the dominance of Sy Syms, and of the English department abandoning the canon, and I worry that I have become the angry prophet. In my defense, let me state that the criticisms come from a place of profoundly caring. I view YU as an incredibly important institution and see *Torah UMadda* as a major value. Due to the potential idealism of its student body, YC could have a superior humanities environment to the Ivies where wokeism and pragmatism get in the way of learning. Giving up the ghost of encountering the great writing of the broader world means an impoverishment of Modern Orthodoxy.



A collection of classic books

THE LITERARY LIFESTYLE

## "Man Does Not Live by Bread Alone" - The Arts as Divine Nourishment

By YONI MAYER

"If I could express it in words, there would be no point in painting." – Edward Hopper

It is fundamental to the human condition to be in constant conversation with the arts.

Before arguing for its cruciality, it is important to first understand the definition of art. For the purposes of this article, Fyodor Dostoevsky's definition will suffice: "To evoke in oneself a feeling one has experienced, and...then, by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling—this is the activity of art." In other words, art is the physical manifestation of the artist's

feelings in whichever form they take, be it painting, writing, music or the like.

Exposure to the different forms of art is critical in the development of one's character. But why? Why is it necessary to interact with the inner dialogue and personal emotions of another individual? Moreover, why should we be invested in thoroughly exploring that deeper aspect of ourselves?

I believe the importance cannot be distilled into one answer. The exigency of art to the human condition lies in multiple planes: character development, spiritual growth, emotional insight, and creative inspiration, to name a few. These are borne out of the fundamental definition of art that we have assumed: that it comes from the experience and feelings of the artist.

First and foremost, as Dostoevsky ex-

plained, art is a tool to physically manifest our emotions and feelings. The arts are the forum in which human creativity roams free. Unbridled by social norms and the cultural modus operandi, the artist shares that part of themselves which is otherwise hidden.

The arts also enable the artist to introspect and interact with his soul and subconscious. As Ray Bradbury wrote in Zen in the Art of Writing, "It is a wise writer who knows his own subconscious. And not only knows it but lets it speak of the world as it and it alone has sensed it and shaped it to its own truth." The artist divulges their psyche on their chosen canvas and invites their identity to shine in publishing, painting and prose.

This outpouring of inner thoughts,

feelings and ideas, all of which have been molded and imprinted into the artist's subconscious by their highly personal experience with the world, is beneficial to the audience of the art as well.

By virtue of art's personal and individualistic makeup, the artist provides insight into other ways of life and opinions, belief systems and outlooks on the world. They illustrate the discrepancies in approaches to life, culture, love, family, community. We understand their point of view better because we peer into the most intimate parts of their subconscious. They stamp their fingerprint on their art's subject matter, style, and form and provide insight into what makes all types of people unique.

*Continued on Page 9*



*THE ARTS AS DIVINE  
NOURISHMENT*

*Continued from Page 8*

In line with Dostoevsky's definition of art, the images we see or passages we read are not straightforward expressions of the artist's feelings, but rather unique expressions and interpretations of those emotions and thoughts. The creativity of the artist influences our own creativity and matures our inventive and artistic sensibilities. Art imbues the viewer with ideas and feelings. Poetry may inspire romanticism, a movie plot might impart a business idea, a great book might help you mold and improve your character.

Furthermore, by forming a better understanding of inner struggles and emotions, we become more empathetic individuals and mature our human sensitivities. In *Orot Haemunah*, Rav Kook explains the importance of this endeavor. He writes, "We must help them develop a refined sensitivity and awareness of the beauty of emotions. This is possible only through the involvement in the wonderful beauty that exists within music, poetry, nature, and all of the arts."

The beauty of mankind's existential personal truths would fall on deaf ears were it not for art's ability to give voice to those otherwise inexpressible emotions. Leonard Bernstein, the famous American composer, once remarked:

The most wonderful thing of all, is that there's no limit to the different kinds of feelings music can make you have. And some of those feelings are so special, and so deep, that they can't even be described in words. You see we can't always name the things we feel. Sometimes we can. We can say we feel joy, pleasure, peacefulness, whatever, love, hate. But every once in a while, we have feelings that are so deep, and so special that we have no words for them. And that's where music is so marvelous. Because music names them for us. Only in notes, instead of words. It's all in the way music moves. You must never forget that music is movement. Always going somewhere. Shifting and changing, and flowing. From one note to another. And that can tell us more about the way we feel than a million words can.

Art's gift of interpreting and expressing our deepest, incomprehensible emotions is not particular to music alone. Literature, painting, poetry, film; these are tools to dive inward, understand our humanity and relate to the eternally perplexing human condition.

The arts help us relate to ourselves and to others, but, perhaps most importantly, they help us relate to the divine as well. Through their mystifying and entrancing nature, they offer a taste of the sense of the ineffable which all human beings crave. We experience and interact with art, and yet we feel a certain disconnect from it – we interpret it in our own way and find meaning in its ambiguity by developing a personalized connection to it. In this light, art is an ideal vehicle for connecting with the divine; we are in awe of its beauty and are comforted that we connect with it in a personal way.

Abraham Joshua Heschel writes in *Man is Not Alone*, "What smites us with unquenchable amazement is not that which we grasp and are able to convey but that which lies within our reach but beyond our grasp; not the quantitative aspect of nature but something qualitative; not what is beyond our range in time and space but the true meaning, source and end of being, in other words, the ineffable" (P. 4)

Later on he writes, "When we stand in awe, our lips do not demand speech, knowing that if we spoke, we would deprive ourselves...It is like listening to great music; how it reaps the yield from the fertile soil of stillness; we are swept by it without being able to appraise it. The meaning of the things we revere is overwhelming and beyond the grasp of our understanding." (26)

Heschel explains that words alone would not do justice to an awe inspiring audience

that values the importance of delving into topics outside of Torah. He writes, "It is easy to devote yourself to Torah [exclusively] if you are convinced that everything else is nonsense. Nonsense is easy to give up. But one who sees the beauty in God's creation, who comes to love it, must be strong in order to devote himself to learning Torah. One must not divorce the world, but rather bear in mind one's lover's quarrel with the world." It may be difficult to see the divine

struggles and we relate and find comfort in the artistic expression of their essence. This is what good art can do.

Art is what we're here for. To create. To imagine. To innovate. To dream. To hope. This is what art does; both for those who create it and those who are enchanted by it. Art is fundamental to humanity; it inspires us to create. It gives us ideas that we can apply to all our other endeavors. Creativity is not transactional. One person's piece of art inspires the art of another and so forth. Ideas build on ideas to better and better art. By exposing yourself to creativity and art you will be more creative in everything you do.

When art speaks to you, you feel it. That painting that captures your imagination, unyielding in its hypnotic trance. The song which brings you on a ride, journeying through tempo, melodies and harmony; that lifts your soul to the highest of heights and sends you back to reality only when the final note is meted out. The book with descriptions so real you feel as though the author has transported you into another world with their prose. Art, true art, is so irresistible because it brings us to a place nothing in this world could compare to. Our imagination is provoked and we take a peek behind the magician's curtain within humanity's subconscious.

If one doesn't think art, in any manifestation, is for him, perhaps he hasn't exposed himself to the right art. He might not have read the right books yet, watched the right movies, or listened to the right music. But it is certainly clear: We NEED art. It is foundational to the human condition.

I don't believe people aren't "into music." I question people who think that movies just "aren't for them" or that they "don't enjoy reading." I think they just haven't found something which speaks to them. We're hardwired to seek out the ineffable. We want to create and communicate with majesty and this is what good art enables us to do. Torah should be our primary focal point in life, of course, but to completely close ourselves off from art altogether would be a shame. Listen to all kinds of music. Watch movies. Go see a show. Read poetry. Read classics. Read fiction. Connect with the thoughts and feelings of the artist. It is fundamental to our experience as human beings. Find the art that speaks to you – it's out there somewhere.

*Art, true art, is so irresistible because it brings us to a place nothing in this world could compare to. Our imagination is provoked and we take a peek behind the magician's curtain within humanity's subconscious.*

with Hashem. We forfeit language's ability to capture meaning and allow ourselves to be swept away by His grandeur. The arts offer an acceptable albeit stulted solution by exploring emotions in ways that words alone could not.

Even though a closer understanding of Hashem and that which inspires awe, may be approached but never fully attained, we certainly cannot come closer to an understanding from our studies alone. Although we may learn about the divine, it is another thing altogether to experience it. It might seem counterintuitive that exposure to the world at large helps with our connection to Hashem. Not only is it helpful, it is necessary.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, in the transcribed conversations with Rav Sabato in *Seeking his Presence*, explains his relationship with general culture and how he approaches it. He explains the hazards with an exposure to world culture writ large and how to balance it with a life of Torah in a dialogue that explores interacting with artistic and creative disciplines. He provides an analogy which I've always enjoyed:

Imagine a hungry man sitting at a table. Someone offers him a slice of bread, then a second and then a third. But the man is hungry for some jam or butter. Someone may come along and say to him, 'Fool, what is more important, bread or jam? Bread! What do you need jam for? I'll give you another slice of bread!' But man does not live by bread alone. This is how I feel when it comes to these matters. Personally, I feel that I need this supplement. I have found this inspiration in world literature.

Elsewhere, in an essay analyzing a Robert Frost poem, Rav Lichtenstein quali-

ties the importance of delving into topics outside of Torah. He writes, "It is easy to devote yourself to Torah [exclusively] if you are convinced that everything else is nonsense. Nonsense is easy to give up. But one who sees the beauty in God's creation, who comes to love it, must be strong in order to devote himself to learning Torah. One must not divorce the world, but rather bear in mind one's lover's quarrel with the world." It may be difficult to see the divine

value in art, but if we remember that it is a manifestation of God's creation, we can't help but appreciate and be inspired by it. This inspiration and feeling of connection with that which is greater than ourselves is found in the highly personal work of an artist as well. We sense divinity in perceiving that humans are more alike than we think. The more personal the work, the more universal it will be. Ethan Hawke, a famous American actor, director and author explained art perfectly in a TED video:

"Do you think human creativity matters? Well, most people don't spend a lot of time thinking about poetry, right? They have a life to live and they're really not that concerned with Allen Ginsberg's poems or anyone's poems—until, their father dies; they go to a funeral; you lose a child; someone breaks your heart. And all of a sudden you're desperate for making sense out of this life. 'Has anybody felt this bad before? How did they come out of this cloud?' Or the inverse—something great. You meet somebody and your heart explodes—you love them so much you can't even see straight. You're dizzy. 'Did anybody feel like this before? What is happening to me?' And that's when art's not a luxury—it's actually sustenance. We need it."

Art can move and shake you. It can humble and inspire you. It reminds of the majesty of the human spirit and the breadth of the universe all within a canvas or a symphony. Most importantly, it is a shoulder to lean on. It is an artist at their most vulnerable and this expression of emotion is comforting. We feel their pain, sadness, happiness, perseverance, and



Raphael's School of Athens

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## Asynchronous Hebrew: A Disastrous Experience

By ABRAHAM KANTER

I just came back from a Yeshiva University leadership trip in Morocco, where I learned the importance of speaking up and fighting for things that make our community grow. With this in mind, I was able to think long

*It seems like YU is prioritizing funds over academics by constructing an obscure way to teach a class that is proven to not work.*

and hard about what happened with the entire asynchronous Hebrew department. It is easy to take advantage of an asynchronous class, as there is very little way to stop it. I have seen many people cheat in this class. It is very easy to evade Proctorio, and rather than make cheating more difficult, it just turns it into a skill that is rewarded through practice. I am and have always been a man of honesty and integrity. I never have cheated and do not want to cheat in the future, and I plan on sticking to that.

With this in mind, my final grade made me feel disappointed. Never in my life did I think I would receive such a terrible grade

in a class that is meant to help us with our future and our religion. I spent a lot of time preparing for the final, but I never would have guessed I would do as poorly as I did.

I don't believe that a class that is rooted in Jewish values can be asynchronous and be this vulnerable to cheating. It seems like YU is prioritizing funds over academics by constructing an obscure way to teach a class that is proven to not work. I believe that it is unreasonable to expect that anyone can learn a new language simply by watching videos and taking quizzes. These classes become even more difficult when a professor's office hours are during times that students are unavailable. For example, my professor's office hours were during shiur time, which created a difficult dilemma of choosing between shiur and discussing my growth in Hebrew.

There are also many ways for Canvas errors to interfere with the ability to complete assignments. It happened very frequently that assignments were not posted on Canvas and I was not able to submit them (since we are not allowed to submit assignments by email). To top that off, late assignments are not allowed. It is very frustrating to have completed an assignment and be unable to turn it in due to a computer glitch on my end and be told to speak with Proctorio's customer service through the phone.

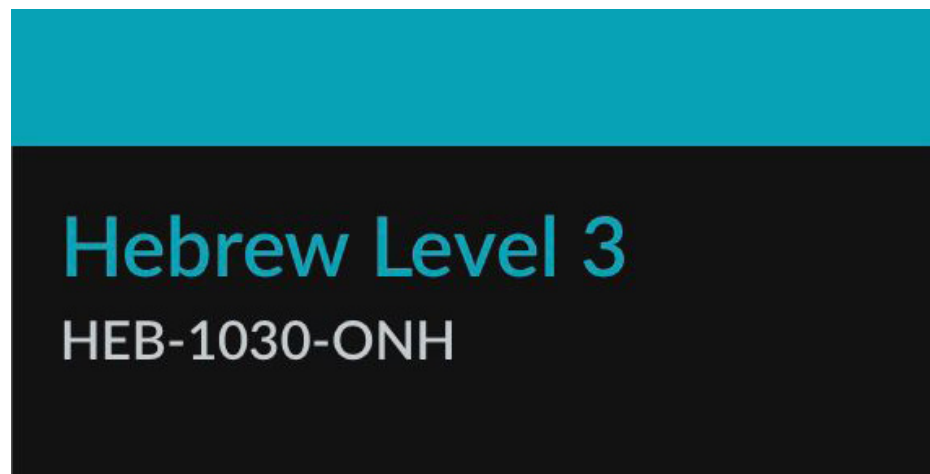
As a college student, I have to juggle time efficiently in order to get everything done. I consistently attend morning shiur and take

five secular classes, so I am very limited on time to begin with. Additionally, I am involved in clubs and extracurricular activities on and off campus. Now let's add in 4 hours a night of study and homework time, not including my Hebrew assignments. I had to take time away from my other homework to do this and I would end up with less time to study and do other assignments for other classes. I know that some people realized this and decided they didn't want to waste their time going through all the Hebrew videos, practices and quizzes if they can just skip it all and use google translate. I did not want to do this, so I skimmed through the lectures and took the quizzes ethically. This way I saved time for my other assignments and

didn't cheat. My results from staying loyal to my values were poor grades in this course.

I felt that the preparation for the final was unfairly geared toward those students who already had some level of fluency. It is extremely difficult to study the hundreds of vocabulary words, and even then, these words might not have applied to the final.

I know that I received the worst grade on the final. For someone who approached the class ethically and honestly, this was extremely disappointing. I know that I am not the only one who feels this way. I think that this is a major issue that needs to be dealt with so that future YU students don't suffer as I did and be able to create a positive experience learning Hebrew.



Hebrew 1030 Asynchronous

ABRAHAM KANTER

## Babylon Review - Dreams on Celluloid, Printed Into History

By SAM WEINBERG

Unlike its historical namesake, the new film Babylon has statues which are not worshiped but rammed down with luxurious rental cars. Worship has taken different forms and different shapes. The patron god of Los Angeles isn't seen in the statues of the night but in the night itself, where eternal stars in the black sky look down on these mortal stars making their way around the developing world of Hollywood in those opulent black vehicles.

The core dynamic of the movies alternates between the creation of art and the culture of creation of that very art. The abstract theories surrounding the value of powerful but ultimately fake stories find a tension with the world where these stories come into being. Manny, played brilliantly by Diego Calva (whose biggest role until now was in the little-seen *I Promise You Anarchy*), does anything he can to stop working at only the Hollywood parties. He wants to go to a real movie set. Jack Conrad, the legendary film star played by equally legendary Brad Pitt, drunkenly invites him to one, the set of a "costume picture" he's involved in. "It's the most magical place on Earth," Conrad tells Manny, only through slurring and mumbling language. "I've heard," he replies in Spanish. Cue the title card, which has come only after a sleepless night and a dizzying extended party sequence.

Art in its idealized form is the subject of distinction throughout Babylon, and the relationship between The Movies (in capital letters) and the movie world is one of the most focused of these discussions. The movie fluctuates between the potential value of art and the wildly destructive culture of its creation. "I always wanted to be part of something bigger," Manny tells aspiring actress Nelle LeRoy (a kinetic Margot Robbie) the first night they meet. She agrees with him, preaching in her particular wide-eyed style

about the cinema's capabilities for escapism and emotional resonance. All of these affirmations only come through a (purposely) abhorrent amount of narcotics. It's unclear, at least at first, how much LeRoy will even remember of this night.

One instance of right-place-right-time

*The masterful Babylon feels like the end of movies themselves.*

later, Nelle finds herself on a set the very next day. Simultaneously Conrad is shooting his "costume picture" at a different studio. Throughout the day, he spends his time waiting for his scene in his tent, drinking and yelling at his assistants what the next line of his screenwriting debut should be, a debut bound to be a masterpiece if you ask him. Conrad is constantly debating with everyone, including himself, about the ability of film to be "high art". He wants to be part of the eternity of such great art and create something so timeless that "tomorrow's lonely man" can look up at the screen and find some dreams worth dreaming.

Damien Chazelle's films seem sequential on some level, building upon themes addressed in the past. His most acclaimed film to date, the beloved and instantly iconic *La La Land*, cheerily sings songs about the fools who dream. Babylon is the experience-weary polarizing older cousin, asking back, "Do you want to know what that dream looks like?" The film chronicles the exploitative nature of art creation in a world of capitalism and the frustrating attempts to make something that may be great, but equally may be embarrassingly bad. Beauty is confined to the limitations of the process which, at its core, chews you up and spits you out, letting you rot on the sidewalk when your time in the spotlight is gone.

Brad Pitt's Conrad brings another layer to the discussion. He's been in the limelight for some time, finding success after success, and has become MGM's biggest attraction. One

of the first moments of the film features his wife (a cameo by Olivia Wilde) yelling at him, her anger amplified by his decision to speak only in Italian. She threatens him that if he doesn't talk in English, she'll divorce him. He doesn't listen and she follows through. Mamma mia!

Conrad doesn't care about his wife, and that trend continues for the multitude of wives he has throughout the movie. ("She doesn't speak English!" someone says of a Hungarian girl he's interested in. "Neither does love," is the reply.) It seems all of his sincerity is saved for one person: George, his depressed producer friend who isn't quite as lucky in his love life. George is Conrad's anchor, the only person who earns his sympathy. Of course, Conrad the artist can't exist in the abstract; he needs Conrad the human being. When George becomes absent, Conrad finds himself falling into a downward spiral. He is comforted by critic Elinor St. John (Jean Smart) who says that he is destined to live for eternity on the screen, and any person in one hundred years can see his face flicker on the screen and he'll live again. One is reminded of the Prince lyric: "Things are much harder than in the afterworld/In this life/You're on your own."

Is the relationship between hedonistic excess and profound personal connection doomed to be an inverse one? Hollywood of the 1920s (and of every decade since) is one where the former flourishes. If the ancient Babylonian festival that depicted the creation of the world was a historical benchmark for such hedonistic focuses, an excessive and over-the-top celebration full of material pleasures, our aging leading man is tossed into that festival world for the rest of his life. For a star like Conrad, perhaps immortality is the only option.

The grasp at eternity is the thing

motivating all of our lead characters. Manny wants to become involved in something outside of himself, "something more important than life," by getting involved in cinema. As mentioned, St. John tells Conrad that he will live forever, dining with angels and ghosts. And Nelle LeRoy knows that her fame isn't something that comes and goes. "You don't become a star," she says. "You either are or you ain't." For a film so inspired by its period, Babylon tells us that the screen defies the laws of time. The Californian update on the ancient city worships not gods themselves but godly immortality that mortals can hope to acquire.

And so comes its wild ending, one of the boldest endings from a big-budget movie I have ever seen. *La La Land* worshiped those who put their life into art. Babylon wonders: are movies the greatest thing on earth, or are they embodiments of the worst? Is our pursuit of finding a new world on the screen indicative of the discontent that fueled that same new world's creation? Is it worth having these dreams at all? In the final five minutes our attention is turned to the greatest films ever made, showing us the capacity of this art. If such beauty is Chazelle's message he wishes to leave us with, what did the previous few hours teach us?

Babylon feels like the end of the movies themselves. Much has been said about the film's lackluster commercial appeal. But what else is the end of the party if not an empty room, abandoned and left for dead like the ruins of the ancient city? We look back at the history of cinema and see our greatest dreams projected on the screen. But what are dreams, Babylon tells us, if they aren't crafted in the endless darkness of the eternally starry night?

But enough about the end. The show's on now. (Later, when this is all over, you can ask your posek if it's the year's best. Certainly feels that way.) Let's hit the party. Or is it a funeral? The movies are dead; long live the movies.

# The AI-ntelligence Factor: A Perspective on Evaluating AI Startups

By YOSEF AXELROD

With the rapidly growing influence of AI advancements, investors are seeking out the next big platform that will revolutionize the world. This trend has recently made a splash as demonstrated by Google's 300 million dollar investment in the AI startup named Anthropic, which positions itself as the "safer" alternative to ChatGPT. However, with so many options, it's crucial for investors to understand what they should be searching for to ensure that they are investing in a startup that is truly poised for success.

Because of the universal application of advances in AI, there are thousands of startups entering industries ranging from healthcare to transportation. With so many startups, however, investment firms are having trouble finding standout ventures. To streamline this process, there are six important qualities investors should be looking for in a startup. To understand the process,

we'll highlight each of these six qualities and pick a company that would qualify under the proposed criteria.

Firstly, investors are looking for start-

this specific industry? Who are the potential customers in this market and are they willing to spend on innovative products? Third, a startup needs to be scalable. AI startups

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*Investors are searching for the next big platform that will revolutionize the world through AI advancements, but with so many options, it's crucial to understand key qualities to look for in a standout startup, from innovation and market opportunity to competent leadership.*

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ups that can bring something unique to the market. If a startup co-opts mainstream applications like ChatGPT as part of its innovation or tries to reinvent the wheel on an issue that doesn't need attention, it is not an attractive investment opportunity. Secondly, investors are looking for a company that can capture a market opportunity. Is there demand for this particular AI innovation in

are unique in their scalability in that AI are constantly learning and improving itself as it reaches new customers.

A fourth factor is that startups should have a strategic advantage over their competitors. Desirable startups should be able to leverage concepts like cost advantages, network advantages and most importantly intellectual property advantages to cement their market share. Fifth, investors are looking to see if there's any interest in the startup's product, even in its early stages. There are even metrics that can be used to value a startup with no revenue. Even if a company does everything right but has gathered no interest, it will likely not have investors interested. Finally, and most importantly, investors are looking for startups that have competent leadership capable of directing the company to success.

A startup in the world of AI that fits the aforementioned conditions is the biotech startup Precision, a company researching "brain-computer interface technology." Precision is trying to develop a system of flexible microelectrodes designed for minimally invasive and reversible surgery in order to heal neurological conditions. While Precision may have a long time to go until they develop their first product and get it approved, it seemingly fits all of the aforementioned

different qualities of a startup worthy of investing in. Precision's technology is certainly an incredibly innovative idea, and it has a large market opportunity waiting in the healthcare industry. According to Precedence Research, "the global brain computer interface market size was evaluated at USD 2.79 billion in 2022 and is projected to surpass around USD 9.31 billion by 2030 with a registered CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 16.26% from 2022 to 2030." With the ability to cure many diseases, Precision can potentially gain significant market share in this burgeoning industry.

What separates Precision from other companies is how minimally invasive the technology is. As opposed to other similar companies that utilize a procedure known as a craniotomy, which removes a significant portion of the skull to cure these neurological conditions, Precision makes a very thin slit into the skull and slides in the device like a letter into a letter box. Furthermore, Precision acquired multiple patents that will allow them to have a significant advantage over other companies. The leadership of Precision is very creative as both co-founders were also part of the team that founded Elon Musk's brain-computer interface company called Neuralink. The company admittedly hasn't gained much traction yet, but that is normal in the pre-revenue stages. Overall, Precision's potential makes it an opportunity that investors should be interested in.

Understanding the dynamics of startup funding is incredibly important to everyone, even those not planning on going into the finance industry. A lack of perspective and understanding of what it takes to create a financially lucrative startup will lead to many lost technologies and potential improvements in living standards. It is important to try and understand what investors are looking for, and we need to try and put ourselves in their shoes to understand the decisions they're making.



GERALT VIA PIXABAY

## Making the Headlines in Torah and Business

By JUDAH SCHANZER

As we all know, the YU motto is "Torah Umadda" which stands for the proposition that one can be a committed Jew and a productive member of secular society. As students at YU, we are encouraged to pursue such an approach to life. As Rabbi Norman Lamm zt"l famously stated, "Torah, faith, religious learning on one side and *Madda*, science, worldly knowledge on the other, together offer us a more overarching and truer vision than either one set alone." For Sy Syms students, in particular, "*Madda*" no doubt conjures up images of success in finance or business, the "truer vision" being a life in which one can achieve success in both business and religious endeavors. Our scholar in residence over Shabbos, Jan. 21st, Rabbi Dovid Lichtenstein, is an ideal role model in this regard.

Rabbi Lichtenstein is the CEO of the Lightstone Group, one of the largest privately-held real estate firms in the United States, which he founded in 1988. During his time at the helm of Lightstone, he has executed some of the largest and most daring transactions in the retail and hospitality sectors, including the acquisitions of Prime Retail and Extended Stay Hotels. Forbes identifies him to have a net worth of nearly \$2 billion. He continues growing Lightstone with a focus on many property types including industrial, multifamily, retail and hospitality. Rabbi Lichtenstein's experience has helped him amass knowledge of the real

estate business as he continues to push the industry and his company to greater heights. Even more impressive than becoming a

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*Even more impressive than becoming a self-made real estate billionaire is his devotion to his faith and the Jewish people as a whole. He donates to many Jewish organizations and works to solve foundational problems that face the Jewish community.*

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self-made real estate billionaire is his devotion to his faith and the Jewish people as a whole. He donates to many Jewish organizations and works to solve foundational problems that face the Jewish community. Examples of this can be witnessed on his very popular podcast and in his best-selling books, both called *Headlines*. As notably, he is a serious *talmid chacham* with an immense knowledge of Torah. This vast Torah knowledge was very much on display over Shabbos.

While YU students love our Roshei Yeshiva, there was a unique enthusiasm in the reception Rabbi Lichtenstein was given, considering his amazing success in both the realms of Torah and business. The weekend of his sharing his Torah ideas is one that we will all savor for a long time to come.

One idea he shared was a comparison of Yosef's and Pharaoh's views of Pharaoh's famous dreams and how we can learn a valuable lesson regarding using our time at YU for the future. Rabbi Lichtenstein explained that when Pharaoh dreamt of the skinny cows swallowing the fat cows without

showing signs of having eaten them, this represents one forgetting the good times in more challenging times. He explained this

as the approach of a wicked person. Yosef the Righteous, on the other hand, viewed the same set of images and derived a means for Egypt to thrive during challenging times

by saving when good things were plentiful. Rabbi Lichtenstein explained that when we are in the workforce and do not have as much time or flexibility as we do now in Yeshiva we should dip into the reservoir of the positive memories and learning from our time at YU to help support us in our growth as Jews and professionals.

Speaking for many of the students in attendance over Shabbos, Rabbi Lichtenstein's status as a role model for a life of *Torah Umadda* is one that many of us will have in mind as we continue our studies in YU and, thereafter, when we enter the working world and make endeavors to achieve success in both realms, as he has done.



A cluster of modern office buildings through a color filter making them look a similar shade of blue/grey

PIXABAY



**CLASS OF 2023**

## UNDERGRADUATE COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY CHECKLIST

Graduating This Year? Mazel Tov!

Be sure to complete all the items below to participate in your Commencement Ceremony.

### **STEP 1**

Consult with your academic advisor or program director to be sure that all of your graduation requirements have been met.

Visit [yu.edu/academic-advising](https://yu.edu/academic-advising) to schedule.

### **STEP 2**

Degrees are awarded in September, January and May. Contact your campus Registrar to determine if you are eligible to attend Commencement.

Visit [yu.edu/registrar/graduation](https://yu.edu/registrar/graduation) for additional information.

### **STEP 3**

Apply for Graduation by your degree's deadline:

**February 28th**  
(May Degrees)

**March 1st**  
(September Degrees)

The Application for Graduation–Undergraduate Degree can be found here: [yu.edu/registrar/forms](https://yu.edu/registrar/forms)

**NOTE:** If you miss this deadline your name will not be included in the Commencement Program.

*Be sure to RSVP on the application to Commencement and give your accurate height and weight so your gown fits just right!*

### **STEP 4**

Pay your graduation/diploma fee of \$150 to the Office of Student Finance.

### **STEP 5**

Cap and Gown Distribution Events will be held on each campus a few weeks before the ceremony.

Come with friends; have your picture taken in the photo booth to be featured at Commencement!

*If you cannot pick up your attire at a distribution event you may pick it up from the Office of Student Life starting the day after the event.*

*No attire will be distributed at Commencement.*

### **STEP 6**

Each graduate will receive **6 guest tickets**. If you would like to request additional tickets, a form will be live in the coming weeks.

### **QUESTIONS?**

Visit [yu.edu/commencement](https://yu.edu/commencement) for updates closer to the ceremony, or email [commencement@yu.edu](mailto:commencement@yu.edu)

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TO CELEBRATE  
WITH YOU!**

**YU.EDU/COMMENCEMENT**