

# LIBRARY STAFF NEWS

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Yeshiva University LIBRARIES

## LIBRARY STAFF NEWS

ISSUE # 14 JUNE 2020

### COVID-19 AND THE LIBRARY: IMPRESSIONS ON WORKING FROM HOME

As the publishers of Library Staff News, we are always looking for interesting stories for each issue. So, we reached out to staff members to collect their impressions of working at home, asking how they have been managing these days, what they have been doing with their new free time (since they don't have to commute), what it's like to work at home instead of the office, what tasks can/cannot be done from home, etc. Here are their responses.

Paul, Director of University Libraries

Like a cat chasing after a flashlight beam, I cherish distractions and, for that reason, have always avoided working at home. And like separate sets of dishes for dairy and meat in a kosher kitchen, the spaces of my work and home lives, I came to understand, were not to commingle. In *Community and Privacy* (Anchor Books, 1963), Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander introduced me to the hierarchy of spaces. Under their influence, whether as a student or employee, I've aimed to keep work space, with its intrusions, challenges, and necessary conflicts, separate from domestic space and its offer of safety and sanctuary. I think of French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, from whose *The Poetics of Space* (Beacon Press, 1969) I began to associate staying home with nesting and daydreaming. My conundrum, shared perhaps with many co-workers, was how to create a space- time relationship for work within the daydream realm of home.

My wise Jewish mother, with her Calvinist work ethic, often told me I needed a schedule for each day. After a few days, I had a plan, which started with taking my mother's advice to heart. Without my walk to campus, I gained at minimum twenty minutes for a bit more sleep but could still start up at my usual time. For the right work space, I took my inspiration from the new At Home section of *The New York Times*, which advised a dedicated area, even if not a formal, spatially discrete office. Finding a chair with good back support and the proper height for using a laptop for as many as four hours at a stretch

came first, and an Eero Saarinen-designed armchair found at Two Jakes in Williamsburg met that need; a small drawer unit on wheels offered the right surface for pencils, sharpener, paper clips, and stapler.

I am especially grateful I already had a working flatbed scanner-printer, and my personal library has been a precious commodity in helping Yeshiva College architecture students find sources and illustrations for final projects. Like many of us, I spend a good chunk of time trying to be heard in chaotic virtual meetings, and although I take solace in articles on Zoom exhaustion, I try to show gratitude for the privilege of still being able to work. One unexpected bonus is a full lunch hour; without the conveniences of Nagel Bagel, the Sky Café, or Dunkin' Donuts takeout fare, for the first time in my adult life, I prepare and clean up after my mid-day meal.

We in Metadata Services and Processing have benefited greatly from the decision, taken about two years ago, to replace the private notebooks that people kept individually at their desks; with a common set of online reference files open to everyone. The "Cheat Sheets" were ready for us to use before we even knew we would be cut off from our printed notes. We have benefited, too, from cooperative cataloging, that is, the databases of OCLC and Library of Congress and others, that often supply missing information for our catalog. For example, if we are cataloging books we do not have in hand, we cannot tell

the number of pages and measurements. Often those details can be ascertained from another library's copy.

Lately, our "Cheat Sheets" folder has been updated into SharePoint. It contains general cataloging information, specific YU practices, such as a list of Talmudic call numbers (compiled by Avrom that we use at YU, important web links, training documents, and directions on how to catalog specific genres, such as Festschriften. We have updated our files and added to them in SharePoint in order for us all to collaborate on these essential documents. We even have a file listing what we should not forget to do when we come back to the campus.

In the meantime, I am eagerly awaiting news from six Israeli companies and academies that are working feverishly to invent effective inoculations against SARS-CoV-2. There is news every day that they are getting closer to finding the key that will unlock COVID-19's grip on the world. It can't come soon enough.

Rebecca, Metadata Services

Cancel My Commute

I will say that commuting 4 hours a day was not easy. Unfortunately, it was part of my life and had to make changes to my lifestyle to fit the commute. If only my feet could talk! Of course, I liked walking 15 blocks to the train station every day. From there it went downhill. I always ran for trains as the doors were closing and missing the mark most of the time. It got worse: running up and down stairs (especially when the escalators were broken), running on uneven platforms, running from sleazy-looking commuters, and running from rats that would occasionally walk on the platform. When trains broke down and I had to find alternate routes, my boots always got me to the right place. Not an easy task considering I had 1 or 2 extra trains. My feet rebelled. So, not long ago, I purchased 3 pairs of expensive hiking boots. I call them subway boots. Well, I won't be taking the trains anymore. At least they served their purpose--for a while anyway.

Now that we are working from home, I was determined to make cataloging a book remotely work. There was no choice; we had to think of how to do things differently. How? Coordinating was very difficult because it was evolving. In our minds, we needed the

physical books in order to catalog otherwise the bibliographical record wouldn't be "perfect." Like spacecrafts, we needed a cool name. Projects always get a name. So, as a joke, I called the project CWOB (cataloging without books). In other words, we cataloged backwards. A very detailed plan was hatched which involved cataloging books based on the acquisition records in Virtua. This was a very difficult "sell." Some catalogers were skeptical, upset, and thought it would not work. Pep talks were given on occasion. I encouraged people to think out of the box. Catalogers experimented with the process and used unconventional source material with the goal of cataloging books. They spoke to and emailed each other; they educated one another. Workflow changed on a regular basis. I received reports on their activities. As time went on, they gained experience and confidence. They were comfortable—more or less. The various processes were difficult but doable.

Training the non-catalogers over the phone, some of whom we had never worked with before, was certainly a challenge. As time went on, the projects were tweaked, assignments rotated, and some jobs split amongst multiple people, who worked on different stages of the project.

All along, we never lost sight of the fact that we would return to the Wilf campus. Of course, we prayed that the books we cataloged actually existed! We had to come up with a logical plan for finding the books. We tossed around some other ideas for opening day as well. Apparently, the challenges will continue, but we have learned new skills that will help us in the future.

It won't help to put your name on your package in the fridge!

Tina, Gottesman Library Head

Image deleted copyright

וְהַפּוֹרֵף הָיָא / The opposite happened (Esther 9:1)

Typically, the month of March 2020 began with thoughts towards the upcoming holiday of Purim, midterms and planning for the days ahead. With the expectation of a normal, standard, regular month—it was true to form with the expected library sounds and sights abuzz with students, professors and scholars working, writing, reading and studying—we were surprised to find that March 2020 was quickly to change the Libraries, in function and form, and all who work in the Libraries. By mid-month it was clear that March 2020 was to be quite unique and one we would surely not forget any time soon. Our expectations for the month of March were certainly flipped about and were the opposite of what we had anticipated of the month of March!

With murmurings of temporary closure of the Yeshiva University Wilf Campus as a trial of sorts, the Mendel Gottesman Library staff quickly assessed the situation with sensitivity and creativity. We considered the types of work that we could effectively accomplish in a

remote setting. This was a chance to re-imagine and to flip things on their heads to ensure continuity of library services within a new and challenging framework. True relief was expressed when we were advised that we were able to return to campus for a few days, albeit this opportunity was limited as more information became known regarding the severity of the situation. When we received word that working on campus was no longer an option, we began to consider the types of work and services that we would be able to provide from afar. We had no way of knowing that we might be away from the Yeshiva University campus for months!

Since mid-March we have been working in a remote atmosphere and we very much look forward to the opportunity to be back on campus working at full capacity! Working in a remote fashion has enabled us to work cooperatively on projects with other teams within the Libraries, including Technical Services and Archives. Maintaining services, although remote, has sometimes been a challenge although technology does help! From teaching in the classroom setting to meeting and consulting with students, we remain ready and willing to assist, seek out materials and encourage the scholarly and educational process in any way possible. Each member of the Gottesman Library team expressed their desire to continue working from afar. Everyone shifted goals and expectations considering our new reality. Our novel work situation was certainly a new experience for all and necessitated patience and creativity. At the same time, as this was a new reality for the entire Yeshiva University Libraries, we each had the opportunity to shift roles, embarking on new areas of focus and working with staff members outside of Gottesman Library on new projects including archival collections related to Covid-19, cataloging projects, cooperative learning and programmatic initiatives, and planning for the future. Meeting with frequency and maintaining connections are key to working successfully in the remote atmosphere. Working cross-functionally with other teams within the Libraries has been key during this time, and consulting with colleagues has been most productive—including situations such as seeking currently inaccessible (on-site) materials for users that may actually be part of a library staff member's personal collection. Frequent meetings on Zoom serve to connect and enable us to work cooperatively on queries and issues that arise. Yet these online meetings are not exactly an equivalent replacement to our on-site, regular day-to-day interactions.

We look forward to the day when we can be back on campus working together face-to-face!

Wendy, Public Services

The first thing I did when I started working from home is to optimize my desk set up. I got rid of old papers and other junk that has been sitting around for a while. I found an old computer monitor that belonged to one of my boys, which I set up so that I now have two monitors to work with. It's a great way for me to see the LibGuide I'm assembling, with the guide on one screen and various websites and information on the other. Since I'm teaching a few online classes, I made the view from the computer look better. I found some wall

hangings that my son bought me from Japan and a few of my violin statues and put them behind me.

I think the happiest one in the house is my dog Molly, who is thriving on all the company and attention! Sending good wishes to everyone. Stay safe and healthy!

Wendy's dog Molly

Sandy, Pollack Library Head

Pandemic Perspectives from Pollack

On Sunday, March 22nd, several members of the Pollack Library met on campus to grab supplies and bid a temporary farewell to both our colleagues and the Library. The following week was a bit chaotic as we tried to adjust to our new work-from-home model and, in some cases, drastically altered our typical day-to-day activities.

Many members of the Pollack Library staff are primarily responsible for assisting patrons at the circulation desk. Transitioning to roles without patron interaction and finding new jobs that complement everyone's specific skillset was tricky. Thankfully, everyone was excited to take on new roles and eager to keep working. Our biggest obstacle was getting everyone's technology up and running at home. Learning how to access our desktops remotely was particularly challenging.

Most of the Pollack staff were quickly able to transition their current positions to remote work. Some staff members took on new roles. Galina and Marlene Austin-Francis have had great success working on special projects in Technical Services. Bernice has been checking all of our e-books links, while Ursuline has been helping us clean up patron records in YULIS. For the rest of the Pollack staff, it is business as usual—albeit from a distance. Transitioning our inter-library loan, reference, electronic resource management, and instruction has been both challenging and rewarding.

Thankfully, we are still able to see each other at our weekly Zoom meetings. There we spend time discussing both our work projects and our “new normal.” As the Head Librarian at the Pollack Library, it gives me a chance to connect with the staff whose smiling faces, I miss dearly. Occasionally, our meetings are interrupted by spouses, kids playing hockey, or our furry friends sunning themselves on the screen. At one of our past meetings, we shared family photos of each other when we were younger and discovered that Alex has always been the handsome man we know today.

During these difficult times, the Pollack Library staff has come together in exceptional ways. Some of us suffered significant losses during these troubling times, and the support system that we have provided each other is invaluable. Last week we began discussions about what things will look like when we return to campus. Each of us is eager to get back

on campus and be around each other, the rest of the YU Libraries staff, and the students. Hopefully, within the coming months, my emails from Bernice will no longer end with the salutation, "I hope you are staying sane."

Edith, Hedi Steinberg Library Head

The first thing that came to mind was to check on the health and welfare of staff. I determined that everyone was well and safe. The second concern was the financial situation of staff. I wanted to be sure that if staff members could not work remotely, they had enough vacation and sick time to keep them financially secure. And for the those who ran out of sick and vacation time, I wanted to find meaningful work. For reference staff there was more than enough work to do remotely since we are weeding our general reference, Judaica reference, reserve, and periodical collections. The reference staff is also doing a great job helping students and faculty remotely, using email, telephone and Zoom sessions to help our patrons.

The issue was finding work for other staff members whose main responsibility was on-site service. With the help of Rebecca Malamud, we have been able to give those staff members work on the items marked for discard. In addition, there were other jobs that could be done remotely and those were assigned to the appropriate staff. I am still working with Rebecca, adding to her army. At this point we have two staff members trained and we hope to draft two more. It adds a lot of work for Rebecca, but the staff will be helping her a great deal with catalog maintenance.

To keep the staff in touch with one another, we email, speak on the telephone, have reference Zoom meetings and full staff Zoom meetings.

It is much better to work in person, but so far, we are functioning smoothly. One of the things we enjoy most is seeing each other, even if it has to be virtually.

Yosef, Metadata Services

In my case, because my wife is part of Congressman Espaillat's team dealing with a host of neighborhood issues related to health and economy, and because she is constantly on conference calls with him and the team, my own work, and my attempts to get down to it, can seem a little "marginal." A major challenge, therefore, is the importance of insulating myself from all the drama and cascading news in order to focus on the task at hand. Not at all easy for someone who is easily distracted at the best of times! For example, as I sit here typing, I'm hearing the sound of a car alarm, maybe half a mile away, that has been going for hours and hours and hours, and probably has nothing to do with what's going on all around us. I imagine that, for some obscure reason, the city is too busy to address my growing irritation at this and stop the darn thing. As a result, all I can look forward to is the thirty second respites between the infernal honkings. Life is hard, folks!

Thankfully, my office connection works well, and I still get a childish delight at being able to access my desktop remotely like this. The icons and text are a little blurry, yes, and you have to be careful not to open too many things or try and commute from one application to another too speedily, but, with a measured tempo things proceed well enough.

The atmosphere outside is deceptively calm, apart from the almost continuous sound of ambulance alarms. Anyone who has read Nicholas Christoff in Sunday's Times will immediately realize what those sirens mean, in terms of Montefiore and other hospitals in the Bronx, and, of course, other hospitals throughout the city. There are waves upon waves of critically ill people, tsunami-like, crashing onto the beaches of ERs; nurses, doctors and orderlies and every level of worker overwhelmed by the influx, fearing not to discharge their duties and their tasks with utter devotion, fearing, almost equally, to be themselves engulfed by the disease. While we, the non-combatants, if also, God forbid, potential victims, sit "in the privacy and comfort" of our living-rooms, enjoying the unutterable privilege of being able to control our immediate environment and work and make an income.

Hovering over all this is a huge and bitter irony: that what could not be achieved through international cooperation and enlightened self-interest on a global scale, namely, the reduction of carbon emissions and of the general fouling of the environment, is now actually being achieved - if only for a brief or, who knows? for a longer time, by the fiat of an invisible agent of Mother Nature, one of the most destructive of the weapons in Her always potent armory. WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction), indeed! One hears of dramatic changes taking place, in terms of pollution levels, for example, and of --though I don't possess any details--the revival, the resurgence, of fauna and flora everywhere like the sudden blossoming in a desert landscape after heavy rains.

Here endeth the lesson.



## Animals Take Over the World

Avrom, Metadata Services

Working at home is very different from the regular way of work. I am getting used to it. Cataloging without the book in hand makes me feel as though I am not doing a proper job and second guessing a lot of things without knowing for sure. Not seeing a person is very difficult. It is very uncomfortable to do things via email or over the telephone and not see a person in front of you. I hope we will be able to get back to the office soon.

Rina, Reference Librarian

Does baking banana bread during my lunch break count as something about which to write?

Stephanie, E-reserves

I've been delighted to see that I'm able to work smarter rather than harder. The commute

frees up time for rest as well as more time for family and friends. I enjoy calling and video conferencing. Besides Zooming with coworkers as well as colleagues, I'm now "Marco Polo-ing" with my niece's children, aged 2.5 and 7 who live in Vermont. My niece has a master's degree in education, so she's enjoying home schooling while continuing her own professorial responsibilities at SUNY Plattsburgh and Champlain College. I'm especially happy to see that I can accomplish 100% of my duties at home (i.e. Electronic Reserves and Repository). I listened to President Berman this afternoon, who answered my question about plans for summer and fall semesters. I feel as much needed now as previously. Why do I say "previously?" Because I've seen YU turn to online initiatives in social work as well as business. The silver lining in having so many of us work remotely is that we're all honing our tech skills. (Thank you JB and ITS!! What would we do without you??).

Chaya Sarah (Hallie), Acquisitions

Distance Learning?

When the campus shut down, in late March, it was suddenly good-bye office, good-bye routine. I knew I would have to fill a critical void in space, time, and structure.

Therefore, instead of duties, I plan my to-do list according to projects assigned to me. I established a dedicated "work zone" with an office-like atmosphere. I stick to a schedule: after coffee and prayer, I go to my bedroom, shut the door, and work at my PC until a convenient break. My days go like clockwork.

Nevertheless, I am always aware that "I'm not in Kansas anymore." I do my projects--and Zoom-ing--in my lounge. (But not PJs!) I frequently answer the door for deliveries and pick-ups. Over the past two months in Crown Heights, I have heard ambulances wailing and watched more than one funeral cortege pass by my window--a sober reminder why I can't be at Hedi Steinberg.

Working at home requires an adjustment. Nevertheless, it has its rewards. I enjoy the flexibility; I can pace myself--stop and get some beauty rest or cook a nice meal. (And watch some movies.) While I miss my coworkers, I bond and socialize with my roommates. Time spent on commuting is now spent on catching up on freelance and housework, and honing skills, i.e. editing, reading, blogging. I signed up on Udemy for a HTML/CSS course. To keep up with our cyber age, I upgraded my software and installed new apps. (Thanks, JB!)

Viewing the lockdown as a challenge, rather than a burden, has made the experience edifying more than depressing. While I do look forward to a return to normalcy, and the Stern College building, I hope to bring along the knowledge I have gained over this strange hiatus and a greater appreciation of library science.

J.B., Library Digital Systems

When I first started working in the Library, a coworker in my department mentioned an idea called telecommuting, in which certain tasks could be accomplished from home using a computer to connect back to the office. Since my own tasks revolved around walking from office to office, checking in on staff issues as they arose, I didn't imagine I would need to transition to a telecommuting role.

The Library historically has not been a place where a Digital Services Department like mine has needed to exist. Books and card catalogs do not require electricity. Microfilm readers and copiers do not require a computer to function. Staff adjusted to electronic cataloging terminals first, followed by early desktop PCs. The first computer many of our staff used was the one provided by the Library. So, if I wasn't planning on entering the telecommuting space, you can be certain many of our staff weren't either.

In the week between discovering a YU student's family was diagnosed with COVID-19 and the closing of the Library building, several staff members began to bring in their laptops to ask me if they could be configured to connect remotely. I was able to set up two pieces of software that many of the staff are now familiar with, GlobalProtect VPN and Microsoft Remote Desktop. I often explain how they work in this simple description:

1. When you turn on your computer/laptop, you are connected to the Internet (the whole world).
2. When you run the GlobalProtect VPN software, you narrow the connection down to inside the YU campus.
3. When you run the Microsoft Remote Desktop, you narrow the connection down to your specific desk in the Library.

In addition to those who brought in older laptops, some staff generously loaned an extra laptop to another. A few staff had recently purchased laptops but had barely used them. And for others, it was the first laptop they ever had in their home. I realized, in one situation, that not owning a laptop means it would be a challenge to find an Internet connection. This prompted my recommendation to purchase a wireless hotspot, a cell phone-sized Internet device that allows your laptop to go online through your cell phone company.

My first full day working from home was Monday, March 23rd. I was overwhelmed with the number of requests from staff members who had just realized they would be able to be "repurposed" into working from home. I wrote a set of instructions for downloading and installing the necessary software and 90% of our staff were able to successfully install it on their own without additional help. I do think the blessing of this entire period is the new desktop computers we have in the offices. Aside from the annoying "Software Changes are Required" alert that has repeatedly appeared at the bottom right corner, we happen to be using very reliable and fast computers in the Library. This has made it possible for a wide variety of home computers, even those up to 10 years old, to be functional when running

programs within the Remote Desktop. We have had few power issues and no actual PC crashes. In response to a power failure, I was able to program most of the desk PCs to turn back on when power is restored, as well as to automatically power up each morning at 8:30am (in case someone accidentally chooses to Shut Down). I am eternally grateful on three occasions in April when our custodian, the late Rafael Martinez, was able to assist me by going into the offices to turn on PCs when they were turned off.

J.B. "working" from home in North Carolina

## LIBRARY STAFF "REPURPOSED"

by Rebecca Malamud and Marlene Schiffman

When the University shut down on March 4, 2020, Paul indicated that he did not want any Library employee to lose vacation and sick time during the quarantine. In addition to the regular Library staff, our temporary employee would have been let go. Therefore, Paul's goal was to make sure that everyone was able to work remotely. Quick planning was necessary.

The Metadata Services & Processing department (AKA, Technical Services) was able to accommodate immediately. The staff of Technical Services had to adjust their own workflow for this to happen. The department was able ultimately to "adopt" nine Library employees, including the temporary employee. As part of the planning process, everyone in TS was asked to think about things that could be done by non-catalogers. This was not an overnight process. As time went on, more tasks became feasible.

A cardiologist friend recently reported that he has been assigned to the COVID-19 section of the hospital. He was told that he had been "repurposed." In the Library, staff has also been "repurposed" to handle new tasks in lieu of their usual work.

This was not an easy adjustment for many reasons. Most of the "orphans" were not familiar with cataloging and they had never used the Virtua cataloging module and, in some cases, the OCLC Client. J.B. had to give "permission" to each of these people to use the cataloging module. The catalogers were given the job of training them. The preparation took time, but it was well worth it because a large portion of our catalog has been cleaned up. More importantly, we helped our coworkers during this difficult period.

Some of the "orphans" were not even aware of the routine catalog maintenance issues that the Metadata Services Department performs randomly whenever they see the need. Rebecca consulted with Paul and the Department Heads to adopt these new helpers from other departments allowing them to handle some overdue catalog maintenance on a more systematic basis. For example, staff from HSL have been deleting records for books that will be deaccessioned in

preparation for the library renovation.

The number of people “hired” grew as time went on. At the beginning, Rebecca thought there was enough work for only 3 people. Since catalog maintenance was a crucial task, the number of people grew. Every couple of weeks, more people were added to the roster. This was crucial as staff lost all their vacation time, and their sick time was diminishing. The number of catalog maintenance projects grew, so more people could be accommodated. As of now, there are nine extra employees working in TS.

Working with new people over the phone presented its own set of challenges. Not only was Rebecca not familiar with the individual and his/her skill level with Virtua and OCLC, but also it was difficult to give directions without being able to view the same screen while training. As time went on, the projects were tweaked. Cooperating with Head Librarians and coordinating was essential.

These are some of the tasks that non-catalogers are presently performing in catalog maintenance:

- merging headings so that they cluster,
- deleting duplicate headings in Virtua,
- deleting duplicate records from Virtua,
- deleting acquisition records in the cataloging module,
- deleting YU holdings in the OCLC database,
- cataloging Revel Master’s theses,
- changing the location code on HSL bibliographical records, and
- fixing title coding so that foreign language titles beginning with articles (such as Der, Die, and Das) are accessible.

There are also fully-cataloged records for which the cataloger forgot to delete the temporary record, marked IN PROCESS. Those duplicates are also being eliminated. Other staff members will enhance the URL's of links that connect physical to electronic copies of books by adding EZProxy prefixes to online honors theses when those are missing. Non-catalogers have also been assigned to help catalogers in doing authority control by identifying names that are obsolete or incorrect in YULIS. For example, it is reasonable to think that a person whose heading includes the date 1916- probably has an updated heading with his death date as well. By finding this authority record, we can keep our catalog in line with the latest headings in the Library of Congress.

Professional catalogers were no less affected. They had to help in the intensive training and in reviewing the work of the "repurposed" staff. Training new staff was done while the catalogers were also learning new skills, practices, and workflows such as cataloging volumes without having the physical book before them. Obviously, the previous workflow was turned upside down. All these adjustments were done with amazing speed and quick

planning as departments were suddenly sent home and told not to return to the office. Since there was a day or two before the Library shut down completely, scans of book title pages and other pertinent information were prepared. These scans lasted until approximately Passover vacation. After that, new workflows had to be established.

Professional Judaica catalogers also have also been cataloging Judaica e-books and honors theses, preparing the next issue of Library Staff News, and editing and proofreading the Catalog of University Authors (see article following).

With all this reimagining of roles going on, J.B., in his capacity as Library Systems Administrator, continued to handle technical complaints and queries. In addition, he now had to quickly convert all the office machines to remote stations in people's homes, each with a different computer set-up. He has had to show everyone how to connect with the office computers and access the cataloging module. In addition, he prepared a lucid explanation of SharePoint for Lunchtime Learning (See article below). We are proud to say that staff has swiftly adapted to the new realities and has been working as a team, although in their own homes. We are taking this opportunity to learn new skills that can be applied when we return to our physical space. In the meantime, we are all on Zoom cooperating to accomplish our goals of maintaining the library catalog, providing resources on our home page, and continuing to answer queries from researchers and the public.

Repurposed?

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, RABBI DR. ARI BERMAN

Dear Students, Colleagues and Friends,

Today should have been the 27th birthday of Breonna Taylor, who was killed by police officers in Louisville on March 13. Yeshiva University stands united as we condemn her murder, alongside those of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and so many other victims of racial violence. We mourn their deaths and offer our sincere and heartfelt condolences to their loved ones. Racial violence by any member of society is horrific. It is especially horrific when those perpetuating it are the very same people who took an oath to serve and protect our communities.

We have all watched in horror and been shaken by these brutal deaths. Our hearts are heavy with sorrow and we understand the anger and fear being felt across the country, especially by Black Americans at this time. We join in the national outcry for justice and reforms that seek to prevent these tragic violent acts from continuing to occur.

The Rabbis of Antiquity taught that the most fundamental idea in all of Jewish thought is to be found in the Biblical verse, “in the divine image did God create humankind” (Genesis 5:1). For this verse introduced to human civilization the radical notion of the infinite worth of each individual as each and every human being shares a common sacredness.

Our university is built on this idea and is infused with the mission that we are called upon to heal the world. In our classrooms, in our scholarship, and in all areas of our community life we must oppose racial oppression and work towards a society of racial equity.

Elie Wiesel said, “Wherever men and women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment—become the center of the universe.”

The University is working on a number of upcoming programs that will provide opportunities for members of our community to build new avenues to advance racial justice. And we call on all members of our YU community—from our high schools, to our undergraduate and graduate populations, to our alumni and friends across the world—to use this time as an opportunity to think deeply about the tragic recent events and consider how we are to respond moving forward.

Yeshiva University’s mission and history demand we make a comprehensive and deep commitment to the betterment of all humanity. We dedicate ourselves to advancing critical thinking, community discussion, intellectual capacity and to improving the world through vigilant activism for the good of all people.

Let us redeem this moment by turning it into a force for good.

## CONDOLENCES

Recently, we were saddened to learn of the death of Rafael Martinez, custodian of the Gottesman Library, of a heart attack. A memorial service was held on May 27, and burial is in Puerto Rico. Martinez worked for over 33 years at YU. He will be remembered as a pleasant, friendly member of the team who was cooperative about keeping our offices clear of trash and dust, taking on extra vacuuming before Passover, and watering the plants while we were banned from campus. He leaves four children. Miguel Gonzalez worked in Housekeeping/Maintenance in the evenings. He was a very friendly person, always smiling, and took his job very seriously. He worked at YU for about 15 years. Condolences to Shulamis Hes on the passing of her father, Dr. Bernard Lichstein, ה"ע. Condolences to Marlene Austin-Francis on the loss of her sister, Dawn Austin-Petgrave, may she rest in peace. Condolences to Stephanie Gross on the loss of her father, ה"ע, Herschel Yitschok ben Avraham ve- Hava and her nephew, Eliyahu Barukh Yonatan ben Miriam Ita, of blessed memory.

The Libraries join the entire YU community in expressing condolences to the family of Dr. Norman Lamm and his wife, Mindella, former President and "First Lady" of YU who passed away within six weeks of each other, ה"ט. Dr. Lamm became President in 1976 and retired in 2013. (See article)

Dr. & Mrs. Lamm, Courtesy of YU Special Collections

## “LEADER & LEGEND:” TRIBUTE TO RABBI DR. NORMAN LAMM, Z”L, MAN OF MANY FACES

by Chaya Sarah (Hallie) Cantor

“Rabbi. Writer. Editor. Scientist. Artist and Poet. Scholar and Pastor.”

Finding all the words to describe Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, z”l, who passed away 8 Sivan 5780 (Sunday, May 31st) at age 92, is difficult. The long-time, larger-than-life president of Yeshiva University was so many things, often two at once, to so many people. But YU’s memorial tribute, held Tuesday, June 2, via Zoom and YouTube, conveyed the uniqueness of a man considered one of the most influential thinkers of Modern Orthodoxy in America. Indeed, with his elegance, wit, and blend of Judaic and secular sophistication, Dr. Lamm embodied the YU prototype.

Highlights of the tribute were moving remarks by colleagues, family members, and former students. YU’s current president Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman lauded the myriad roles and achievements of Dr. Lamm, calling him “leader and legend.” Dr. Lamm closely mentored Dr. Berman and had even acted as a diction coach who stressed “the cadences and rhythm” of good speech in sermons and “getting the right message at the right time.” Every word he spoke was carefully chosen, terms and concepts made crystal clear. “Like an artist, Dr. Lamm inspired us to soar to the heavens,” Dr. Berman said. “Like an architect, he knew how to bring heaven down.”

Rabbi Herschel Schachter (RIETS Professor of Talmud) praised Dr. Lamm’s tireless work in building up the university. Rabbi Dr. Yossi Levine (of The Jewish Center) described Dr. Lamm’s remarkable intellectual gift for synthesis. Calling him a “rationalist who wrote deeply on Chassidic thought,” Dr. Levine remembered Dr. Lamm as both “gentleman and scholar,” someone warm and funny who loved fellow Jews, regardless of individual flaws or behavior, and who brought about compassion, harmony, and above all joy to people’s lives. Renaissance man par excellence, who constantly juggled private and professional matters, he retained his focus on the needs of his congregation. “He made the rabbinate a lifetime vocation,” Dr. Levine declared.

It was the fourth speaker, Dr. David Shatz (Chair, Department of Philosophy, Stern College), who gave YU Libraries a big tip of the hat. Discussing Dr. Lamm’s impact on world Jewry, Dr. Shatz mentioned the project, undertaken by former Dean of YU Libraries Pearl Berger, to preserve Dr. Lamm’s sermons. This compilation, “Derashot shedarashti: Sermons of Rabbi Norman Lamm,” contains almost all the sermons, which span more than a half century, from 1951 to 2004. It also includes tape recordings of lectures, adult education classes, Chag HaSemikhah gatherings and more, from 1960 to 2003.

Information about Dr. Lamm's life and works can be found in the YU Library website under "The Lamm Heritage": [https://www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage/meet#\\_ga=2.11337716.1596516345.1591164001-224630813.1584319886](https://www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage/meet#_ga=2.11337716.1596516345.1591164001-224630813.1584319886).

The second half of the tribute featured relatives' tender recollections of Rabbi Lamm, the family man, loving father, grandfather, and uncle, and his untiring attention and encouragement to each family member. Rabbi Lamm was also a devoted husband to Mindella "Mindy" Lamm, z"l, who tragically passed away just 46 days earlier from the COVID-19 virus.

Memorial Tribute host (and founder of JSafe) Rabbi Mark Dratch described his father-in-law as a man "whose DNA was that of a Galitzianer, whose mind was that of a Litvak, whose soul was that of a Chassid, whose mien was that of a scholar, whose pen was that of a poet, whose tongue was that of an orator, and whose heart was that of a ba'al chessed [person of kindness]." Indeed, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm was everything, and beyond. His legacy was aptly summed up in one word: "multifaceted."

Yehi Zichro Baruch – יהי זכרו ברוך. May his memory be a blessing.

The "Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm ZT"l Memorial" can be viewed on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COKg8mwfNgY&t=1s> or by clicking the embedded video below.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm ZT"l Memorial - Streamed Live on June 2, 2020

## ONE LAST MOMENT TO SHINE

by J.B. Holderness

At the end of many newscasts, we often hear of individuals who have risen to the challenge of the current circumstances to perform a selfless acts of generosity that make them heroes of the day. During the period of our Library building closure, our late custodian Rafael Martinez rose to the challenge on three different days, assisting me with technical challenges that I could not accomplish without his assistance.

As many of our staff know, the second most important thing for successfully working from home (after turning on your own personal computer) is ensuring the computer in your office is turned ON. In the days prior to our full building shutdown, I had made an effort to check each office to ensure that every PC was switched on and ready. But this did not account for power failures in the building. On March 25th, there was a power failure on the 3rd floor that left a few computers in Technical Services, as well as one in my office, switched off. I sent a text message to Martinez asking for his help. He responded that he was working outside the Library building, but would call me as soon as he could walk over to the offices.

About an hour later he called me to mention that the computers in Technical Services had turned on, but the one in my office displayed a message on the screen: “Boot Error: No hard disk detected.” I knew this would be a challenge, so I walked him through a few simple steps to rebooting the computer into a maintenance mode and asked him to read the menu choices to me over the phone. After about 20 minutes of trial and error, he mentioned he had another task to do, but would call me back toward the end of his shift if I wanted to try the repair again.

Around 2pm he called me back to let me know he was back in my office, at the computer, and ready to try again. We went through another 20 to 25 minutes of various unsuccessful options, until I finally instructed him to choose an option to reset the boot loader to “factory defaults.” This caused the computer to restart and the usual Windows screen came up, followed by the login screen. I casually said to Martinez, “Okay, you fixed it.” And he responded, first with surprise, then a joyful laugh, saying “Wow, I fixed it?!” I told him he just repaired a computer that wasn't able to turn on, stuck on an error screen, and is now fully working again. He was ecstatic, saying “I am the man! I am going home to tell my girlfriend about this!”

In this period of isolation, when I feel resistant to trying something new, I remind myself of this moment and the joy it brought to both Martinez and myself. He will be missed.

## PLANS FOR FALL SEMESTER

While the University has not made a final decision on plans for Fall 2020, one of the scenarios we are exploring is that we would have classes online until the Jewish holidays and in-person thereafter. The plans are being developed in consultation with medical professionals, city and state officials. Specific and concrete plans will be announced in the coming weeks.

Selma Botman

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

## LAUNCHTIME LEARNING

by Marlene Schiffman

We have been privileged to continue our Lunchtime Learning program (now more "Launch" time than Lunchtime) on Zoom. Our Staff Development Work Group hosted two sessions, one on SharePoint and one on COVID-19 resources that were both quite well-attended.

INTRODUCTION TO SHAREPOINT AND ONEDRIVE by J.B. Holderness

Our ongoing series of informative talks for the staff featured a presentation by J.B. on May 5th on the Microsoft web services SharePoint and OneDrive. SharePoint is a web-based (Internet) software application used for sharing documents and updates. The documents may be edited by more than one person simultaneously so it is most useful for collaborative work. OneDrive is a web backup copy of all personal files, and any of these files can be moved into SharePoint. Changes are auto-saved to ensure nothing is lost. There is also a version history where past versions can be viewed in case the editor would prefer to restore a previous version. Files can be moved in order to group them into folders. Any files that staff members may have previously stored in the DropBox website should be migrated to SharePoint because it is a larger and more secure file space.

OneDrive is a file storage system that runs in the background and backs up files from the desktop, documents, and pictures folders on each desk PC. As staff members create new files, or change existing ones, the files are automatically backed up to OneDrive. By opening a web browser, these files can be seen and edited while outside of the office. The changes are then synchronized back to the desk PC.

View the PowerPoint slides in the Staff Guides section at the bottom of our Library home page, or by clicking the following link:

[Introduction to SharePoint and OneDrive \(PowerPoint Slides\)](#)

And for those who were unable to attend; or may have had minor technical difficulties during the virtual meeting, the Zoom system provides a link to the recording. It is now available through the (YouTube-style) interface by clicking the following link:

[ZOOM Introduction to SharePoint and OneDrive Lunchtime Learning](#)

INTRODUCING THE NEW COVID-19 RESOURCES LIBGUIDE created by Wendy Kosakoff

On May 13, Wendy demonstrated her new LibGuide designed to make us aware of a wealth of professional, health, religious, and family resources that we can access during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are some categories of the many sites available.

Information about the virus: symptoms; how to disinfect the home; how to find accurate information from the CDC, NIH, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins; how to spot misinformation; view the progress of the disease by states (especially NY and NJ); contact their hotlines, governors' messages; national and international statistics.

Library and digital collections: National Emergency Library (a consortium of libraries giving free access to their materials during the lockdown); NY Public Library, Kindle, Nook, Barnes & Noble; audiobooks; Jewish resources (contributed by Tina and Shulamis);

Folksbiene Live!; Bergen Shuls Together (created by Shulamis. See article below.); mental health sites; ritual and prayer; online courses; guides to all kinds of hobbies.

Wellbeing: taking care of yourself; YU Counseling Center; National Suicide Prevention; preventing domestic violence; dealing with stress and anxiety; entertainment; yoga, meditation, mindfulness, and workouts.

Virtual experiences: Go while you stay home to museums around the world. Visit zoos, aquariums, national parks, and historical sights.

Performances: Live streams; virtual concerts; Broadway shows; Met opera online.

Kid stuff: Answers to kids' questions about the virus; audio books for children; articles on what to do when you are bored; board games by Zoom; puzzles, origami, quizzes, trivia, old films like Charlie Chaplin's, old software games; streaming video and documentaries.

All this can be accessed by clicking the following link: [COVID-19 Resources LibGuide](#)

Wendy's training video can be viewed by clicking the following link: [ZOOM COVID-19 LibGuide Lunchtime Learning](#)

All the staff who were able to attend expressed their appreciation to Wendy for having compiled all these resources and masterfully demonstrated them for us.

Charlie Chaplin

## 2020 CATALOG OF UNIVERSITY AUTHORS

### [2020 Catalog of University Authors](#)

This year the 2020 Catalog of University Authors, encompassing works from March 2019 to February 2020, was produced wholly online. This catalog is issued annually to recognize scholarly and creative work at Yeshiva University. Fifty-six individuals--both faculty and staff--submitted bibliographic and descriptive data about their books and book chapters, journal articles, performances, blog entries, documentary films, music scores and visual art. The 189 entries listed here represent the lively discussions and creative vitality at Yeshiva. Library staff members who helped prepare this year's edition are Paul, Nicole, Stephanie, Rebecca, Wendy, and Marlene Schiffman.

The catalog can be viewed by clicking the following link: [2020 Catalog of University Authors](#)

## 2020 YU STUDENT LIBRARY RESEARCH AWARD

by Wendy Kosakoff

The Student Library research Award is designed to recognize outstanding library research conducted by an undergraduate student at Yeshiva University in support of a paper assignment. Congratulations to our 2020 YU Student Library Research Award Winner David Levene! David is a psychology major with a minor in English from Yeshiva College, class of 2020. His excellent award-winning paper is titled “[Family Therapy for the Treatment of Eating Disorders](#).” His extensive research, the depth and originality of his paper, and his careful adherence to APA style guidelines impressed our committee. Mazel tov David! The judges for the award included Zvi, Paul, Stephanie, Wendy, Rina, Sandy and Rebekah. The prize was a \$250 award check and a framed certificate. David Levene's essay can be viewed on YAIR by clicking the following link: [Family Therapy for the Treatment of Eating Disorders](#)

David Levene

## HELPING HAND: SHULAMIS CREATES COMMUNITY WEBSITE

by Chaya Sarah (Hallie) Cantor

After lending her electronic skills to YU's COVID-19 Resource Guide, where else could she be of service? Shulamis Hes looked no further than her own back yard.

[BergenShulsTogether.com](#), Shulamis's co-creation with neighbor Libi Michelson, offers a comprehensive, user-friendly website for Bergen County, New Jersey residents anxious for the latest info on COVID-19 and access to local resources. While other websites and social media groups offered similar information, nothing was centralized or properly organized.

The project was initially conceived as a sort of shul bulletin. Instead Shulamis, together with Libi, decided on a dedicated website with expanded network and outreach. In an article in Jewish Link (May 7), Shulamis explained how she was inspired by PC COVID-19 Taskforce, a “dynamic hub” created by rabbis and doctors in Passaic-Clifton, which led to the creation of a similar hub in her own Teaneck community.

The [BergenShulsTogether](#) homepage includes eight tabs with links to global, national or local resources. All have been properly vetted and verified --no “fake news,” scammers, or conspiracy kooks. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), the ultimate authority for COVID-19 information, can be accessed; “Clara,” its interactive tool for self-checking symptoms, can offer instructions for medical attention. A “Give” tab presents opportunities and listings for charity or assistance. Other actions include donations to food pantries and volunteering to deliver groceries.

Given the website's Jewish base, it is only fitting that a “Torah/Prayer” tab exists. This is a spiritual goldmine of podcasts, additional learning websites, or Zoom links; Shulamis mentioned “an editable list of COVID cholim [sick].” The “Assistance” tab addresses common immediate concerns--i.e., financial, mental health, and food supplies--while

directing patrons to government associations and worthy organizations like Project Ezra and Hebrew Free Loan Society. There is also a Facebook Page where events are constantly posted and information updated.

What happens, G-d willing, when the COVID-19 crisis ends? Shulamis envisions a transformation of BergenShulsTogether into a central hub of resources for the Bergen County community featuring additional sections such as Education Tools, Halacha, and Hashavat Ha-Aveida [Lost & Found]. Other possibilities might be “Ask the Techie” and “Ask the Handyman” and a whole archive of users’ questions and answers.

Shulamis welcomes anyone “detail oriented, tech-savvy, or good at writing” to help maintain the website and improve its navigability. For further information on the COVID-19 resource center or how to get involved, visit: [http:// www.bergenshulstogether.com](http://www.bergenshulstogether.com).

## TWO FACED? HINDISHE LEE'S LATEST PUBLICATION

by Chaya Sarah (Hallie) Cantor

What was she? Adulteress or victim? And what was he? Schemer or scholar?

Both Talmudic Sage Rabbi Meir and his brilliant but tragic wife Beruriah are extensively analyzed by Hindishe Lee, whose article “Beruriah: The Final Act” appeared May 20 in *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary E-Journal*, 16 (1).

Drawing on Rashi, Babylonian Talmud, and contemporary sources, Hindishe dissects the two main characters—their personalities and patterns of behavior—and the oddly ignored story of Beruriah whose sin, caused by her husband’s machinations, led to her suicide and his flight to Babylon in disgrace. According to Hindishe, this story has been misinterpreted because of that era’s misogynistic attitudes. While Beruriah was justifiably indignant at the prevailing belief that women were “of weaker minds” than men, Rabbi Meir’s “test” of her moral fortitude revealed his own deviousness, as well as narrow-minded arrogance. And during the act, was Beruriah the actual aggressor? Through careful grammatical analysis, Hindishe proves otherwise.

Yasher koach, Hindishe –a true Beruriah in your own right—and Mazel Tov on your intellectual achievement. Wishing you more articles where you will put to further use your critical skills, Judaic knowledge, and expertise in reference and research.

Hindishe’s article can be reached by clicking the following link: [Beruriah: The Final Act](#)

## EPIDEMIC IN THE 19TH CENTURY: THE EPIDEMIC THAT BROUGHT JEWS BACK TO JERUSALEM

Excerpted from an article by Zack Rothbart at the National Library of Israel Blog, "The Librarians"

A century ago, the Spanish Plague killed tens of millions of people globally.

A century before that, communities throughout the eastern Mediterranean were devastated by a bubonic plague outbreak, which reached the ancient Galilean city of Safed in 1812, quickly decimating its population.

Just a few years prior, three waves totaling some five hundred followers of the Vilna Gaon (Elijah ben Solomon, of Vilnius, Lithuania, 1720-1797)—one of Jewish history's intellectual and spiritual giants—had come to the Land of Israel from White Russia, fulfilling their leader's own dream a decade after his death. It was a significant demographic boost to the relatively small and overwhelmingly Sephardi Jewish community already in what was then Ottoman Palestine.

The failure of the last major group of Ashkenazi Jews that tried to establish itself in the Land of Israel was the main reason why this group had to settle for the slightly less holy city of Safed, instead of Jerusalem. At the end of the 1600s, a group led by Polish Jew "Judah the Pious" had established a community in Jerusalem. The community was soon unable to support itself, nor pay off its growing debts. Ashkenazi Jews were soon banned from living in the holy city.

Safed

In fact, it would take the bubonic plague to get Ashkenazim back into Jerusalem.

With the plague ultimately claiming the lives of some 80% of Safed's Jewish community, towards the end of 1815 some of the Vilna Gaon's disciples decided it was time to finally relocate to Jerusalem. The group was led by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Shklov (died 1827) who had also led the first wave of immigrants in 1808.

It took about five years, but after sending representatives all the way to Istanbul to negotiate with the Ottoman authorities, Rabbi Menachem Mendel's men succeeded in securing a royal decree annulling the debts owed by the previous unrelated Ashkenazi community, decades earlier.

Jerusalem, Golden Gate looking toward the Mount of Olives, by Carl Werner, 1863

While visiting Jerusalem in 1837, Rabbi Yisrael of Shklov, (died 1839) the head of the Safed community, received word of a devastating earthquake in the Galilee. His entire city was destroyed, 4,000 members of its Jewish community lost, causing him to remain in

Jerusalem. Many refugees from Safed did the same, joining the followers of Rabbi Menachem Mendel and their descendants. Ultimately, this small contingent of the Vilna Gaon's disciples laid the foundation for the renewal of Jewish life in Jerusalem.

Congratulations to the Class of 2020!

Editor: Marlene Schiffman Layout: J.B. Holderness Contributor: Chaya Sarah (Hallie) Cantor

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