Man Breaks into Schottenstein Hall, Sets Fires

By Yitzchak Carroll
and Elisheva Kohn

The Schottenstein Residence Hall on the Beren Campus was broken into early on a Monday morning of Friday, Dec. 20, and three small fires were set. Peter Weyand, 33, was arrested at the scene by Fire Department of New York (FDNY) Fire Marshals on charges of burglary, arson, reckless endangerment and criminal trespass, though officials are not charging Weyand as a suspect in a hate crime at this time.

After kicking through the glass door of the dormitory, Weyand walked down the hallway of the lobby and matched matches left out in the open to start three small fires, according to an FDNY press release. According to officials, the matches were intended to light Chanukah menorahs. Firefighters arrived on the scene shortly thereafter and extinguished the flames without injuries.

In an email to Beren students at approximately 11:30 a.m. on Friday morning, YU Security informed students of “an incident” that set off the fire alarm, adding that “an arrest was made and Security is working with the NYPD on next steps.” The email also emphasized that “there is no current threat to our residence hall or the campus.” YU Security sent another email to YU students and faculty members, as well as parents of undergraduate students, on Saturday evening at 7:41 p.m., clarifying the incident following the coverage by media outlets that occurred over Saturday.

According to the email, an intruder approached the Security team at Schottenstein Residence Hall asking for help, at which point the Security team “immediately called 911 and did not let him into the building.” After kicking through the glass door, entering the building and running to the back lounge, the intruder “set a small fire with toilet paper.”

“The fire was extinguished immediately by the sprinkler system and the NYPD and FDNY were on site within minutes of the initial call,” YU Security wrote in the email. “A fire alarm went off and residents were instructed to stay in their rooms; after the intruder was arrested and the FDNY cleared the room, an all-clear announcement was issued.” According to the email, the investigation is “ongoing,” but the NYPD “concluded this was not a hate crime.” It reiterated that “there is no current threat to our campuses.”

On Saturday evening, the NYPD Hate Crimes Task Force tweeted, “While the arson at Yeshiva University is currently not believed to be a hate crime, the NYPD and HCTF are staying touch with FDNY until a final determination is made.”

Footage released by the FDNY shows a person kick the bottom pane of the glass door outside of the dormitory building and then walk away, only to return and kick the door several more times. The individual then pushed through the pane and crawled into the dorm lobby, picked up a telephone at the security desk and put it back.

According to multiple Stern College students residing in Schottenstein, fire alarms went off in the dormitory early in the morning and commotion ensued as students began to run down to... Continued on Page 3

History Revisited: Controversy Over LGBT Clubs at YU Graduate Schools

By Doniel Weinreich

Much controversy and fanfare has been raised this year over demands for an LGBT club at Yeshiva University’s undergraduate colleges. Students attempted to officially form such a club last year, but they were rejected by the administration. This year a march and rally was organized in support of LGBT students at YU and in protest of the administration’s complacency. The rally and its aftermath led to media coverage outside of YU and a renewed discussion in the Modern Orthodox community about LGBT issues. Earlier this year, President Ari Berman announced a new team led by Senior Vice President Josh Joseph to work on formulating a series of educational platforms and initiatives that will generate awareness and sensitivity. The developments of the past few years, however, are not the first time controversy has been ignited over LGBT groups at YU. Several of YU’s graduate schools have had LGBT clubs since the ‘80s, and in the mid-‘90s controversy erupted over those as well, in one case garnering national media attention.

LGBT groups had existed at Cardozo and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine since at least 1987, but Kay’s graduation speech ignited a mass movement to ban them, with particular focus on Cardozo.

One of the first such controversies occurred in 1993 over a meeting of an LGBT group in the Wurzweiler School of Social Work (WSSW). Wurzweiler was founded in 1957 and in its early years was located in midtown Manhattan. However, in 1982, Wurzweiler left midtown and relocated to Belfer Hall on YU’s Washington Heights... Continued on Page 7

Over $5.6 Million Raised at Hanukkah Dinner; $18 Million Donation by Azrieli Foundation Announced

By Avi Hirsch

Over $5.6 million was raised from the 95th Annual Yeshiva University Hanukkah Dinner and Convocation, which marks a 12% increase from last year’s dinner and the largest sum raised from the dinner in at least seven years. The Azrieli Foundation, honored at the dinner with the inaugural Legacy Award, announced a gift of $18 million raised at the dinner to support the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration and to contribute to undergraduate scholarships.

This year’s dinner was held at the New York Hilton Midtown Hotel and hosted around 600 attendees. According to Adam Gerdts, VP of Institutional Advancement at YU, the $5.6 million raised at the dinner “will be used across the university including scholarships.”

Howard Jonas, founder and chairman of IDT Corporation, Genie Energy and IDW Media, was awarded an honorary doctorate at the dinner. He serves as chairman of the board of Rafael Pharmaceuticals, and he and his wife have contributed to a wide array of causes in the Jewish community.

This year’s dinner also marked the inauguration of the Legacy Award, presented to the Azrieli Foundation in celebration of “36 years of transformative partnership with Yeshiva University,” and in honor of the foundation’s 30 years of philanthropy, according to YU News. Dr. Naomi Azrieli, chair and CEO of the foundation, accepted the award.

The Yeshiva University Women’s Organization (YUWO) was recognized at the dinner as well. YUWO provides scholarships to YU students, sponsors educational Shabbatonim (shabbat programs) for YU undergraduate students, funds chesed (charity) programs and offers stipends for undergraduate students in need.

“We’ve crafted an educational vision that... capitalizes on the opportunities of our era by growing science, tech, innovation and entrepreneurship,” said President Ari Berman in his opening remarks. He continued by elaborating on the financial success that YU has seen in recent years. “But this does not speak directly to our fundamental purpose,”... Continued on Page 4
A Letter to the Josh Joseph Committee

By Jacob Stone

An extensive historical analysis of the discussions that surrounded the creation of gay student clubs in the YU graduate schools has been published in this issue. It chronicles the controversy involving the gay clubs that were formed at Cardozo Law School, Albert Einstein College of Medicine and other YU graduate schools in the 1990s. The discussions had during that controversy maintained relevance to the current deliberations of the committee led by Vice President Josh Joseph examining the state of LGBTQ inclusion on campus.

After a student protest demanding the creation of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) and equal funding for LGBTQ-themed events, the YU community and the committee led by Senior Vice President Josh Joseph should take a moment to consider the lessons that history has taught us.

In the 90’s, then-President Norman Lamm elected to allow gay clubs in the graduate schools to continue, claiming that YU’s non-denominational status required him to forgo his personal religious convictions. He was referring to the secularization of YU that occurred in 1970, in which YU separated from RIETS and became a non-sectarian institution in order to qualify for government funding. While YU continues to be rooted in Jewish values, its graduate and undergraduate divisions remain secularly President Lamm and the YU administration, therefore, could not discriminate against gay students who sought equal access to university facilities and student activity funds.

In the modern day, Yeshiva College, Stern College for Women, and the Sy Syms School of Business are all, as YU’s undergraduate institutions, part of the same non-sectarian charter that governs the graduate schools. Thus, the question must be asked of the committee led by Joseph: what has changed since President Lamm allowed the formation of gay clubs in the graduate schools in the ‘90s? If the legal protections preventing discrimination against gay students have not changed since then, why does the administration allow LGBTQ clubs at the graduate level but forbid them to undergraduate?

I am not the first to make the connection between YU’s non-sectarian undergraduate and graduate schools. At the time of the graduate school controversy, Rabbi Chaim Dow Keller wrote to President Lamm in The Jewish Observer, “To borrow a phrase from your book, Torah Umadda, the problem ‘will not sneak away like a thief in the night.’ Are your undergraduate colleges, Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women, under the same non-denominational charter? Sooner or later you will have to face the problem of gay students in these schools. How will you avoid the problem there? Whatever means you are presently using will soon become obsolete, if you are true to your duty as the head of a non-denominational institution to ‘conform to the secular law.’”

I must agree with Rabbi Keller. If President Berman is to be true to his duty as the head of this non-sectarian university, he cannot continue to discriminate against undergraduate students based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Many opinion pieces have been written in the YU newspapers that discuss the interplay of halakha and LGBTQ issues, and their conclusions have been both constructive and thought-provoking. But those discussions should be theoretical, not practical, in nature. As a non-denominational institution, our duty lies in accepting the multiplicity of narratives that exist in our colleges, one of those being that of the LGBTQ community and its allies.

Thus, I request that the committee led by Josh Joseph reflect on the history of LGBTQ inclusion in this university and consider the hypocrisy that is inherent in this university’s current attitude towards undergraduate LGBTQ clubs and events.

YU’s secular nature does not undermine the Jewish roots of our school, and the school may require religious classes or offer Jewish holidays off, given that such provisions are offered equally to all. The Jewish roots of our school do not, however, permit discrimination towards specific groups of students.

More legal defenses of LGBTQ students have evolved since the 90’s controversy surrounding the graduate schools. Title IX, a prohibition against discrimination based on sex at institutes that receive federal funding, “protects students, employees, applicants for admission or employment, and other persons from all forms of sex discrimination, including discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity.” YU is subject to Title IX as a recipient of federal funding, yet the administration consistently hampers student activists’ attempts to arrange events and clubs surrounding gender identity, among other categories of LGBTQ.

Some universities have applied for and received religious exemptions from Title IX, but it remains unclear if YU would be able to secure such an exemption as a non-sectarian institution. When asked for comment on YU’s Title IX status, Senior Vice President Josh Joseph noted, “YU has not to date applied for a Title IX exemption. We work diligently to ensure compliance with all laws and regulations while maintaining the environment and culture that are core to our mission. Our policies prohibit any form of harassment or discrimination against students on the basis of protected classifications.”

But both New York state and city law have provisions banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. New York State’s human rights law explicitly prohibits colleges from ‘deny[ing] the use of its facilities to any person otherwise qualified, or to permit the harassment of any student or applicant, by reason of . . . sexual orientation.’ If YU is working to ‘ensure compliance with all laws and regulations,’ as Joseph claims, then why have LGBTQ-themed clubs and events been suppressed by the administration?

In the 90’s, YU made clear in a press release fact-sheet that student leaders, not the administration, are in charge of club approval and allocation of funds for student activities. This could be argued to be a defense of the university’s practices; if it is the students who reject funding for LGBTQ clubs and events, then the administration is not acting in a discriminatory fashion.

Efforts by student leaders, however, have shown otherwise. The student council presidents of the Yeshiva Student Union (YSU), the Yeshiva College Student’s Association (YCSA) and Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC) worked throughout the past academic year with President Berman and other administrators to secure a GSA on campus but it was not approved. They recounted that a club application for a GSA was submitted in the Spring 2019 semester, but members of the Office of Student Life contacted them to inform them such a club could not be allowed on the undergraduate campus. Clearly, it is the administration, not student leaders, who are discriminating against LGBTQ students.

Erin Harrist, Senior Staff Attorney at the New York Civil Liberties Union, commented on the current state of affairs at YU, “The university — including the undergraduate schools — is not incorporated as a religious entity, so it should need to comply with the New York City Human Rights Law, in which case, it would be discrimination for the university to not permit a gay club ... I would say with fair confidence that they need to let the club exist.”

Continued on Page 8
1. **Uptown Observer/Commentator Shabbaton**
   - Turns out, the people I work with are actually kind of cool.

2. **YU ranked one of the top five “most underrated colleges in the country,” according to patch.com**
   - Agreed. YU would be 26th if it weren’t for swag day.

3. **The “I am just a minyan man looking for a minyan woman” mug on Redbubble**
   - Great Chanukah gift idea!

4. **General Seating**
   - They should’ve just called it Sy Syms Seating. #soldout

5. **Billy Joel**
   - From “Uptown Girl” to “We Didn’t Start The Fire” — this guy shall henceforth be referred to as the YU Prophet.

6. **Roomies of Commies**
   - Sorry all the major stories happen on Friday morning when you are trying to sleep in. Love you.

7. **Our very own YCSA President’s View From YU**
   - Weiter, meine Freunde. Yes, I’m a YCSA President.

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**7 Up 7 Down** by Elsheva Kohn

**YU admissions brochures: intellectuals vs. women**

Come on, you can do better! I want to grow as a Mommy, a Morah and an Eshes Chayil! #gobigorgohome

@realbriskarav on Twitter

You like your own Tweets. Tragic.

**Should you put ketchup in your chulent?**

DID THEY HAVE KETCHUP IN THE SHTETL?? YOU TELL ME.

**People who bring their shabbos bags to class on Thursdays**

The ultimate way to signal to everyone how in-town-y you are. #escapeYU

**The Rolex**

A lousy timepiece, especially in comparison to the ORA Watch Watch Watch Watch.

**The lamb at the Chanukah Dinner**

“Thh, not even that great,” according to a person familiar with the matter.

**Man attempts to set Schottenstein Hall on fire**

Eh... Have you seen all those brOkEn eLEvAtOrs though??? Count += 1

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**SCHOTTENSTEIN HALL, continued from Front Page**

the lobby. Students noticed the broken glass and heard rumors from fellow residents that a burglar attempted to break into the building but were told by security guards to head back up to their rooms.

Fire alarms continued going off as students locked themselves in their rooms. Nearly a half-hour later, FDNY firefighters accessed the dorm’s public address system and notified students that the matter was under control. When students came down in the morning, they noticed the front door glass was shattered. The door was repaired later Friday morning.

Automatic sprinklers were also activated in the newly-opened Schottenstein communal kitchen. The kitchen is currently functional, according to an email Beren Campus Director of University Housing and Residence Life Rachel Kraut sent to Schottenstein residents shortly after the incident was made public.

Communication deficiencies exacerbated the situation. “The lack of information we received for the first 15 minutes was more alarming than what was actually happening,” said one Schottenstein resident, who wished to remain anonymous. Resident advisers were not formally notified of the attempted break-in.

Shortly before Shabbat, Kraut sent an email to Schottenstein residents to assuage concerns. Kraut contended that the university does not believe the matter was a targeted hate crime, and that YU Security “worked to make sure this was resolved quickly,” adding that guards “called [911] immediately.” No students were in the lounge at the time of the incident, according to Kraut.

Schottenstein resident Dani Lane (SCW ‘21) remarked, “the situation was really confusing and a little scary due to the lack of information but I really appreciate the quick response of YU’s security, the NYPD and FDNY.”

According to the suspect’s LinkedIn page, Weyand was working as a freelance software developer prior to the incident. On Thursday, Dec. 19, the day before the incident, Weyand posted on LinkedIn, “They’re trying to make a martyr of me, but I’m no martyr. I’m a helper and a doer. I want to help people but I don’t know how.”

Several hours prior to that post, Weyand wrote, “Killing is the old way. If you want to move forward in the world you must find a way to love and respect other people that doesn’t involve violence. We need everyone to get together and realize that we are just a bunch of monkeys sitting under trees. And... just because you have more toys, that doesn’t make you better than the little guy.”

“Attacking any religious institution is a serious crime and we have zero tolerance for acts of arson in this city,” said FDNY Commissioner Daniel Nigro in a statement. “Thanks to the thorough investigative work of our Fire Marshals, a dangerous individual has been quickly apprehended.”

As of the time of publication, the FDNY’s Office of Public Information and the NYPD’s Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Public Information did not respond to The Commentator’s inquiries.

Jacob Rosenfeld and Avi Hirsch contributed to this story.
By Sruli Fruchter

A Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA) “Meet & Greet” was held on the Wilf Campus on the evening of Dec. 9. Although the official title of the event was “YCSA Meet & Greet,” YCSA President Leib Wiener explained that the purpose of the event was to “show support to the LGBTQ community at YU.”

“Creating dialogue about the grassroots LGBTQ community and its allies on campus was something that I thought was incredibly important.”

Leib Wiener, President of YCSA

Students Discuss LGBTQ Issues at YCSA Meet & Greet

According to YU News, the Azrieli Foundation’s donation is “one of the largest in the world,” and the dinner was held in response to the Azrieli Family’s Legacy Award. The Azrieli Foundation is the gold seal of philanthropy for extraordinary work in the field of Jewish education.

“Having a small, yet diverse, group of students meet to discuss how to better the lives of an underprivileged population gives me hope,” Molly Meisels, president of the YU Pride Alliance shared. “I, along with other members of the LGBTQ+ student body, and student leaders, will continue to work on promoting dialogue on the issue of LGBTQ+ rights in our institution. This is just the beginning of our advocacy.”

Informed in September, the YU Pride Alliance is an unofficial student group that does not receive funding from YU’s Office of Student Life (OSL). According to its Facebook page, its mission is “to foster an environment of acceptance on [YU’s] campus for the LGBTQ+ community and its allies — community is at the root of what we stand for.”

“As President Berman and other administrators have noted, the students at Yeshiva University must create dialogue for the issues that we think are important at our institution,” Wiener explained. “To that end, creating dialogue about the grassroots LGBTQ community and its allies on campus was something that I thought was incredibly important.”

Students at the event also expressed frustration about the state of LGBTQ issues on campus. Among the topics raised were the inability to host LGBTQ events at YU, disappointing meetings with YU officials about LGBTQ concerns, and YU’s refusal to sanction an LGBTQ club.

Past and future efforts to work with YU administration on addressing LGBTQ issues were reflected upon during the YCSA event. At one point this year, a student shared, eight students went to Senior Vice President Josh Joseph’s office to try collaborating with him on possible solutions to LGBTQ concerns.

“The president has asked me to facilitate a number of meetings for the team with students — groups, individuals — as well as many others,” Joseph commented on that meeting. “Those are well underway, and we have had many learning opportunities through these conversations.”

This was not the first time YU students advocated for LGBTQ inclusion on campus. Last year, the YU College Democrats brought Ben Katz (YC’11), an LGBTQ activist, to YU to speak about LGBTQ inclusion in religious Israeli communities. Before that program, the last event at YU dealing with LGBTQ issues took place in 2010, when a panel organized by the Tolerance Club and the Wurzweiler School of Social Work was held on the topic of “Being Gay In The Modern Orthodox World.”

Over the course of the 2018-2019 academic year, The Commentator reported, then-current presidents of YU’s student councils met with President Berman and other university officials on numerous occasions to discuss LGBTQ-related issues, including the possibility of forming an official YU Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club. Although the GSA club’s initial application was approved by Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC), Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) and YCSA in the spring of 2019, YU’s Office of Student Life denied the club’s application.

Conversations about LGBTQ inclusion on campus have resurfaced this year. Following the march for LGBTQ equality on campus on Sept. 15, the YU Pride Alliance was formed. Former YU employees and alumni later organized a “PledgeNotToPledge” campaign leading up to YU’s annual Giving Day.

“[YCSA is] trying to help an underrepresented community start dialogue on campus,” Wiener noted. Other students at the event shared a similar sentiment. “LGBTQ awareness is an important discussion to have on campus,” remarked SCWSC VP of Clubs Elka Wiesenberg after the event, “and I’m proud to be a part in making it visible by participating in this event.”

As of the time of publication, Dean of Students Dr. Chaim Nissel and Senior Director of Student Life Rabbi Josh Weisberg did not return a request for comment.

HANUKKAH DINNER, continued from Front Page

he added. “Why are we here?”

“Our goal and purpose is to transmit our positive Jewish values to our children, to fill their lives with meaning,” he explained. “Very simply put, this is the purpose of a Jewish education is transformative for the future of our communities,” said President Berman. “The Azrieli family is the gold seal in philanthropy, and this gift reflects their true partnership and commitment to the essential work of Yeshiva University.”

This year’s dinner was the first in five years to not feature a keynote address; the last such dinner was the 99th annual dinner in 2014. When reached for comment, Gerds emphasized Dr. Azrieli’s address in response to the Azrieli Foundation’s acceptance of the Legacy Award. “[W]e were delighted for her to share the announcement of this transformative gift,” he said. “Featuring her in this way was aligned with the design of the dinner.”

Last year’s dinner took place on the heels of shakeups in the Office of Institutional Advancement that resulted in Julie Schrieber’s appointment as Interim Vice President of Institutional Advancement. This year’s dinner is the first since Gerds was appointed to fill the position in March. Since Seth Moskowitz resigned from the position the morning after the 92nd Annual Hanukkah Dinner in 2016, no individual has held the title of VP of Institutional Advancement for two years in a row.

“This was my first Hanukkah Dinner at YU,” said Gerds. “I am excited to keep the momentum going and working together with my colleagues to continue to support the university’s efforts.”

According to Gerds, “The Office of Institutional Advancement, the Marketing and Communications Office, the University Events Office, University Leadership, and lay leadership all had a role in organizing the dinner.”

Other than the annual Hanukkah dinner, the Office of Institutional Advancement is responsible for large-scale fundraising efforts such as the annual 24-hour Giving Day fundraising campaign. This year’s Giving Day, which raised over $5.7 million for student scholarships, brought in far fewer donors compared to previous years, and over $4 million of the $5.7 million raised was donated by 11 individuals.

Past honorees of the dinner include American politicians such as Adlai Stevenson, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Jack Kemp, Colin Powell, Joseph Lieberman, George W. Bush, Hillary Clinton, John McCain, Mike Bloomberg, Al Gore, Kirsten Gillibrand, Cory Booker, Jack Lew and Andrew Cuomo; Israeli politicians such as Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog, Chaim Herzog and Nir Barkat; philanthropists such as Ghitli Lindenbaum Stern (the widow of Max Stern), Sy Syms, Philip Belz, Ira Mitzen, Stanley Raskas and Laurie Tisch; as well as columnists such as David Brooks and Bret Stephens.
Student Councils to Bring Back Chanukah Concert, New Programming Planned

By Commentator Staff

The Yeshiva University student councils will be bringing back the annual Chanukah concert this year after a five-year hiatus. The “GMF Capital and Yeshiva University Chanukah Concert,” slated for Dec. 23, will begin at 6:45 p.m. in the Lamport Auditorium on the Wilf Campus.

President Ari Berman will begin the event with opening remarks, which will be followed by a siyum (completion ceremony) on Shas by Sy Syms School of Business (SSSB) Dean Noam Wasserman. Singers Benny Friedman and Mordechai Shapiro will then perform with the Freilach Band.

After four years of “Chanukahfests,” the YU student councils are reintroducing the annual Chanukah concert in an effort to reach “people from a wide spectrum of YU,” according to Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) President Ariel Sacknovitz (SSSB ‘20).

According to Sacknovitz, the event will be “geared towards everyone in YU, no matter which group you choose to identify with.” To this end, Sacknovitz said he convened small focus groups to identify possible performers. He then polled over 100 students from the four men’s Undergraduate Torah Studies (UTS) morning programs and from varying religious backgrounds on the Beren Campus to select performers that would appeal to a wide array of students. The results from the poll led him to select Shapiro and Friedman for the concert.

“We are building the event in a way that appeals to everyone on campus,” Sacknovitz said. “There is separate men’s and women’s seating as well as general seating. The performers appeal to a wide range of people. The post-concert programming has a range of options that can be good for all of YU. All in all, we are excited.”

In an effort to make the concert more appealing to students, Sacknovitz decided not to charge current YU undergraduate students for admission. According to the concert website, tickets for YU faculty and administrators cost $15, tickets for alumni cost $20 and general tickets cost $36.

Multiple student council sources, who commented on the condition of anonymity, said the tab for this year’s event, food and post-event programming is expected to amount to roughly $60,000. According to former YSU President Nolan Edmonson (YC ’19), last year’s Chanukahfest cost less than $20,000—a third of the reported cost of this year’s event.

YU’s Office of Student Life (OSL) and University Dean of Students Chaim Nissel did not respond to The Commentator’s inquiries regarding the event and its budget. Sacknovitz declined to comment on budgetary matters relating to donations from GMF Capital and other sponsors.

Sacknovitz noted that he is fundraising to help defray costs and that with ticket sales, he hopes to break even to what past Chanukahfests have cost. He further emphasized that making tickets free for students “will allow a greater number of students to be involved and enjoy Chanukah on campus.”

Nevertheless, the concert’s cost sparked concerns among some students. “I have no idea what the goal of the concert is, or why the institution is investing so much into it,” said one Yeshiva College (YC) sophomore, who commented on the condition of anonymity.

Following the Chanukah concert, there will be several activities for students. Leil iyun learning-based events will be held in men-only, women-only and coed formats. For the men and women-only events, young Israel of Woodmere Rosh Beis Medrash Rabbi Shay Schachter, RIETS Director of Semikha Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz, SBMP Mashgiach Rachami Rabbi Aharon Ciment and MVP Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Elchanan Adler will be giving shiurim. The coed option will be led by YSS Assistant Director Rabbi Jon Green and his wife, Debra. Latkes, donuts and drinks will be available for students in the Purman Dining Hall.

Previously, Chanukah concerts were a staple of the holiday’s programming in YU. However, in 2015, the decision was made to cease running concerts, due to their cost and the need to pass the tab onto students. Additionally, attendance was low at past Chanukah concerts, with many attendees coming from outside the student body. Student leaders decided to replace the concerts with “Chanukahfest” events, modeling the Welcome Back Bash and Yom Ha’Atzmaut celebration. These events have been comprised of various arcade and carnival-like games designed to foster socialization among students, as well as refreshments.

SOY President Yoni Broth (SSSB ’20) touted the unifying nature of the Chanukah programming slated for this year. “By having a concert, and a leil iyun, and a social reception, and Mordechai Shapiro and Benny Friedman, it is truly an event that can cater towards the entire university, much like the Yoms and Purim festivities do,” he said. “This concert is a chance for all of our students to unite as a whole, and enjoy not only the entertainment, but also enjoy our peers who attend this complex institution that we are a part of.”

Students are looking forward to this year’s event. “I’ve never been to a Benny Friedman or a Mordechai Shapiro concert before, so seeing them both in concert at the same time is going to be an amazing experience,” said Ben Freund (SSSB ’20). “There’s so much going on and I’m so excited to go.”

YSU Student Council President Chaim Mahgereftel (SSSB ’20) credited Sacknovitz’s effort for planning and executing the event. “Ariel is a true leader for taking the initiative of bringing back the Chanukah Concert,” he said. “People should recognize how much time and effort he devoted to making the concert a success and making it a special evening for all students.”

“I am so grateful for every person who worked so diligently on this project,” added Torah Activities Council (TAC) President Bella Adler (SCW ’20). “Jewish engagement comes in many shapes and sizes in our diverse community and I’m thrilled to support and help organize the concert. Music can be a unifying factor for many people and I hope we allow it to be just that.”
Jewish Week Journalist Barred from Speaking at YU Shabbaton

By Avi Hirsch

Yeshiva University’s Office of Student Life (OSL) rejected a request to bring Jewish Week journalist Shira Hanau to speak at a joint YU Observer/Commentator club Shabbaton on Dec. 14. Senior Director of Student Life Rabbi Josh Weisberg explained the decision by referring to the fact that Hanau had reported on recent YU events.

“For this Shabbaton experience that we are bringing sensitive about,” wrote Weisberg in an email to the Student Council leaders organizing the Shabbaton, “I don’t think it makes sense to invite a speaker that has recently been reporting on YU current events.”

Hanau was one of several options put forward by the student newspapers to be a guest speaker at the Shabbaton and was the only one denied. After Hanau was rejected, Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) Opinion Editor Laura Adkins was invited and spoke at the Shabbaton.

Hanau, a staff writer at The New York Jewish Week, reports on politics, religion and the American Jewish community for the paper. She covered the “We, Too, Are YU” march for LGBTQ representation at YU in September, as well as the subsequent dissolution and reinstatement of the YU College Democrats club.

“Journalists provide a necessary voice in any community,” said Hanau. “I would welcome the opportunity to speak with Yeshiva University’s student journalists about reporting on and being a part of a community.”

Hanau was previously invited to give an interviewing workshop at Yeshiva University High School for Girls (Central) on Oct. 31, which was covered by YU News at the time.

Molly Meisels (SCW ’21), editor-in-chief of the YU Observer, was frustrated by the OSL’s decision. “It is evident that Yeshiva University would rather avoid controversy amongst their rabbinic leadership and administrative body than provide students with diverse opportunities,” she said.

In December 2017, a request by the YU Poetry Club to screen the film “Dead Poets Society” was rejected by the OSL. Their reason for rejecting this request was that the film contains “inappropriate material” that is not in line with Yeshiva University halachik and community standards,” according to an email from Weisberg to the president of the Poetry Club at the time. According to Common Sense Media, the film is recommended for parents for ages 14 and up.

By Elizabeth Kohn

A new initiative to bring a coed Shabbat experience to the Wilf Campus is launching this weekend with a joint Observer/Commentator club Shabbaton. As part of the new “Community Shabbaton” model to the uptown campus, student leaders and the Office of Student Life (OSL) have created a framework to invite clubs to run Shabbatonim where students can participate in coed meals and programming in a smaller setting. This is in contrast to the major coed club Shabbatonim that have taken place on the Beren Campus in the past.

The Observer/Commentator Shabbaton will take place as a parallel event to the main Shabbat meals and activities on the Wilf Campus that are open only to men. Meals will be held in the Yeshiva Community Shul at Shenkl, and JTA’s Opinion Editor Laura Adkins and RIETS Yeshiva Rabbi Jeremy Wieder are scheduled to speak to the students participating in the Shabbaton.

Adkins, who previously served as Deputy Opinion Editor at The Forward, will be teaching an advanced writing seminar at Stern College for Women this spring. Approximately 20 editorial board and staff members from The Observer/Commentator and The Observer are expected to attend. Accommodations will be provided for any students who need in Washington Heights.

The idea of the new Shabbatonim is to bring the product of cooperation between student leaders and the OSL. OSL Senior Director Rabbi Josh Weisberg, TAC President Bella Adler (SCW ’20), SOV President Yoni Broth (SSSB ’20), TAC VP of Shabbat Ariella Eshmol (SCW ’20) and Wiener aimed to find a way to make the Shabbaton experience on campus more appealing to a wider range of students.

Taking student feedback into account, they concluded that to accomplish this, it would be necessary to offer a “normal coed environment for people who want to be in that environment,” according to Eshmol. Unlike previous major coed Shabbatonim on the Midtown campus, this new model will focus on individual clubs and allow them to develop their regular coed programming to the weekend while avoiding an overwhelming social experience for the rest of the students on campus who prefer to remain in a non-coed environment. These new Shabbatonim will effectively bring the new Beren “Community Shabbat” model to the Wilf Campus. According to Eshmol, keeping the meals and activities “normalized” will “make sure that everyone feels comfortable on campus.”

Yehez藜a University has a diverse student community,” said YCSA President Leib Wiener (YC ’20), “and providing different Shabbat options to keep students on campus and foster our community is important and essential for the continuity of our Yeshiva University ecosystem.”

Uptown Coed ‘Shabbat Experiences’ to Launch with Joint Commentator, Observer Shabbaton

By Elian Lindenberg

The first of its kind, the Shabbaton is the new Beren “Community Shabbat” model to the Wilf campus,” explained Wiener. According to Wiener, the Roshei Yeshiva are constantly being “updated” on new Shabbat programming ideas.

Upon hearing about the initiative to bring smaller coed groups uptown for Shabbat, Elana Adkins (SCW ’21) commented, “I am happy to hear they are expanding the community uptown for the women as well. It is not just our university, our campus, too. We should feel welcome here.”

The upcoming Observer/Commentator Shabbaton was also very well received by the YU administration’s staff. “After the controversies surrounding women on the Wilf Campus for Shabbat arose last year, I am proud that student leaders are taking the initiative this year to provide the YU undergraduate student body with diverse Shabbat experiences,” commented Molly Meisels, editor-in-chief of The Observer. “YU is not one thing. Its students do not belong to one religious subset. Allowing students to choose their version of a meaningful Shabbat is an integral aspect of their experiences on campus.”

When reached for comment about the new Shabbat programming, Dean of Students Dr. Chaim Nissel said, “The Office of Student Life works closely with student leaders and YU administrators to create programming that meets the diverse needs of our student body.”
LGBT CLUBS
continued from Front Page

campus. Its new location on the same campus as the yeshiva would exacerbate future tensions. On Nov. 21, 1993, a group of Wurzweiler students began advertising an event on the campus bulletin board, placing signs on the floors of Belfer frequented by Wurzweiler students. At the time, The Commentator, YU’s student newspaper, went down, and many Yeshiva College (YC) students voiced concern about such an event taking place on the same campus as the yeshiva. While such a meeting doesn’t belong in any Orthodox institution, “their audacity to have it on this campus where the Beit Midrash is located is even more troubling,” YU president, Yehuda Teichtal, released an official statement saying, “We understand that a small group of WSSW students plan to meet Sunday to discuss what they have called gay and lesbian issues. Our legal counsel advises us that we are required to permit the meeting to proceed. We will do what the law requires and nothing more.”

The controversy over the Wurzweiler meeting happened within a general context of a recent focus on LGBT issues and increased tolerance in the yeshiva and the university at YU. That same month, controversy ensued over the Yeshiva College and Albert Einstein College of Medicine since the previous summer.

The controversy over the Wurzweiler meeting catalyzed by a comment at the 1994 Cardozo Law Forum, took a stand against the club, claiming that Lamm was allowing “the po-
groups and letting Torah principles and the CBSN in The Chronicle of Higher Education in

Major objections to the presence of gay clubs pointed to an article by Rabbi Lamm in the 1974 Encyclopaedia Judaica Yearbook. In the 12-page article, Rabbi Lamm attempted to define the legal and halachic analysis of homosexuality, laying out several possible Jewish approaches to the issue. His conclusions noted that “certainly, there must be no acceptance of separate Jewish homosexual societies, and ‘under no circumstances can Judaism suffer homo-
sexuality to become respectable.”

The controversy over the LGBT group at Cardozo reached a peak the following year, catalyzed by a column at the 1994 Cardozo commencement. At the ceremony, one of the student speakers, Michael John Kay, exclaimed “Michael Joseph, I love you,” in reference to his same-sex partner with whom he had exchanged rings and vows during the previous summer.

LGBTQ groups had existed at Cardozo and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine since at least 1987, but Kay’s graduation speech ignited a mass movement to ban them, with particular focus on Cardozo. The Forward reported that in the aftermath of the speech, President Lamm’s office was “blitzed with phone calls and faxes.” Many were upset at Rabbi Lamm’s initial silence regarding the incident. As the controversy grew, President Lamm emphasized and reassured in recruitment.

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The meeting, however, did little to quell the dissidents. Stier, who was at the meeting, wrote a letter to The Commentator disputing the attorneys’ opinions and claiming that the religious exemption was much broader. Similar opinions were advanced by RIETS Roh Yeshiva and Cardozo Law Prof. Gavriel D. Bleich, as well as former Assistant to the Solicitor General Nathan Lewin (YC ’57). The controversy might have died down, but for a new wave of media coverage this time by national newspapers. The Washington Times ran an article in April, followed by The New York Times in May and the New York Post in July. Stier remained adamant that “the second you allow gay clubs at Yeshiva University you are degrading the Torah U’Madda symbol.” He made several statements to the media criticizing YU’s “side of the bargain” during his interview and said that he and the university “are not legally a religious organization” as “being a religious organization means that the government cannot legislate against you.”

Today, Stier emphasizes that his primary grievance was with Yeshiva University’s unwillingness to engage with the issue and define what it stood for. The club had been a focal point for debate at Cardozo at the time was totally secular in nature and gave no consideration to halakha. He wanted YU to pick a side and reconcile its institutional schizophrenia. “I think the university missed an opportunity to include various stakeholders in an open and respectful dialogue, and doing so would have led to a better outcome for Yeshiva. I hope they don’t make the same mistake today,” he reflects. “It’s important today — more so than at the law school — that the university have an open and welcoming environment for all students, and to struggle with the challenge of doing it in a way that remains true to Torah U’Madda.”

The Haredi world got wind of the controversy, and the ultra-Orthodox began using the press to the disapproval of our Torah tradition,” the author wrote.

Some of the chief agitators at Cardozo had graduated, and the ire of the traditionalist undergraduates turned to the newly established Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity chapter at Yeshiva University. When asked about the relevance of the Cardozo controversy to the current situation in YU’s undergraduate colleges and the legality of disallowing undergraduate LGBT clubs, Senior Vice President Josh Joseph replied, “Our team is currently meeting with students, parents and community members who have been involved, focusing on ways to make our campus culture more inclusive. We are looking into the areas implied by your questions but at this point our focus is still in the middle of our discussions.”

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was more definitive. After reviewing the case, Erin Harrist, Senior Staff Attorney at the New York Civil Liberties Union, concluded, “The university — including the under-graduate schools — is not incorporated as a religious entity, so it should need to comply with the New York City Human Rights Law, in which case, it would be discrimination for the university to not permit a gay club ... I would say with fair confidence that they need to let the club exist.”

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JOSH JOSEPH COMMITTEE, continued from Page 2

Thus, I request that the committee led by Josh Joseph reflect on the history of LGBTQ inclusion in this university and consider the hypocrisy that is inherent in this university’s current attitude towards undergraduate LGBTQ clubs and events.

According to Rabbi Blau, gay pride was seen as a celebration of that choice, which is what was perceived as a problem by the roshei yeshiva. Rabbi Blau confirmed that today he would not stand by the content or rhetoric of the letter.

Exacerbating the controversy that sum-mer was a syndicated article by JTA, which reported that Yeshiva College undergradu-ates were now also trying to start a gay club. According to an anonymous student, this was actually an attempt to force the admin-istration to “take a stand against the club.” The Commentator, however, reported that no such petition was submitted, and the student council president claimed students only entertained the possibility as a joke.

At the start of the school year in 1995, YU’s Director of the Department of Public Relations circulated a 4-page fact sheet to answer some common questions and deflect some of the criticism they had been receiving. In the sheet, he reiterated that the under-graduate colleges were unaffected by the clubs in the graduate schools, and that YU does not endorse homosexual activity. He explained that the human rights ordinance of the City of New York prevented YU from taking any action against the clubs and that their lawyers concluded that YU would not be eligible for a religious exemption given its non-sectarian status. They further concluded that even if YU was a religious institution, they would still likely be unable to ban the clubs given the conclusion in the Georgetown case that allowing clubs to exist and receive money from student activity fees does not legally constitute an endorsement or support by the university.

As the school year began, the contro-very around gay clubs exploded. Some of the chief agitators at Cardozo had graduated, and the ire of the traditionalist undergraduates turned to the newly estab-lished Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity chapter at Yeshiva University.

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By Rabbi Aharon Kahn

Ad Mossi Atem Poschim al Sh'Tei haSe'farim. "How long will you struggle two opinions?" How long will you halt between two value systems? — Kings (18,21)

(Dr. Lee began his thoughtful, well-written essay with a quote from the Catholic writer, G.K. Chesterton that we are seeking to discover and to describe the "taste of Torah U'madda. But, all that aside, I agree with the Chestertonian observation. Still, I am wondering to what extent he is considering my position, to cite Eliahu HaNavi.)

Dr. Lee’s essay is a carefully wrought analysis of the question of adding secular studies to Yeshiva. Some who have studied the subject agree with the Chestertonian observation. Indeed, the Catholic writer, G.K. Chesterton, wrote, "How long will you straddle two opinions?" How long will you halt between two value systems? — Kings (18,21).

Dr. Lee argues that it is possible to have a YU, a Yeshiva University. He argues that this institution is the whole vision of Torah U'madda. I would not like to get fastened on the sticky slogan of "YU, Yeshiva University." What you might counter, would a university be without a slogan? And why not then also a mascot? If we have managed without a mascot all these years, we probably can manage without a slogan.

As slogans go, my tastes incline me more towards those ancient, well-worn expressions which marshmallow instantly our attention and our allegiance. We would do nicely with slogans like Na’aseh Va’Nishma, Be’Ar’ar veGiyora BiShmay Shemaya, Shem haMeforash, VeHaShem, Na’aseh veNishma, Emes VeEmunah, HaShem, Yir’ah, Ahavah, and HaMitzvos.

To me, these slogans seem to be most appropriate to the purposes of our institution, most suitable to reflect its message. "Nishama" would refer to the Torah learning at YU, and "Na’aseh" to the application of that Torah learning to life (or, as our talmidim call it, to life out there). What is the Ten Commandments? From that unbounded "ery of our talmidim call it, to life out there). Why do we need a Yeshiva University? To address the modern world, we want Yeshiva University's address to be the Torah.

The commentator adds: What is Yeshiva University? or, in the second part of his essay, Why do we need a Yeshiva University? To address the modern world, we want Yeshiva University’s address to be the Torah.

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Yeshiva, Yes, continued from Page 9

and they are not to be brought upon the holy altar of the yeshiva. Nor is the teacher to engage the students of the yeshiva in any discussions which would introduce them to freewheeling thoughts or to stories of “Romanen.”

Prominent among this document’s signatories are the Netziv, the Bais HaLevi and the namesake of our yeshiva, Ray Yitzchok Elchonon Suger.

The Commentator ought to publish the entire text of this document. It is a sad document for us to see. It frightens mightily for what should have been patently obvious. And it reflects the views of the gedolei Yisroel whose opinions we revere because they are steeped in Torah and righteousness, in awesome Yisroel and awe-inspiring HasHem.

It is important for us moderns to remember also that in their day the argument of the maskilim included the need to respond to “modernity.” And such were the arguments of the Hellenistic Jews a very long time ago.

Our yeshivas were formed with more than a hundred years ago, Yeshiva Etz Chayim. In honor of Ray Yitzchok Elchonon who was truly loved by all, the yeshiva was named Yeshivas Rabbi Beneh Yitzchok Elchonon. Whatever its name, our yeshiva was to be a continuation of the legacy of the Wolozhin Yeshiva Etz Chayim. Our strength lies in our ability to preserve that legacy. We Jews were never given the charge of keeping the torch of the ideal of our time. We were charged with the keeping of the Torah. As such the justification argument goes, for me not to understand it at all. It is simply untenable illogical. If the standards of the evaluators are contrary to Torah standards, they are invalid. We can therefore strive to keep our yeshivas. If these experts get their values elsewhere and their vision of the good and the great is not rooted in Hashkafus HaTorah, then they are unable to preserve our values and our vision. If their sense of right and wrong, or of true and false, is not predicated on the halachah and contradicts halachic principles, why do we strive to keep them and still remain true to our Torah?

As to the question of state funds, osar is osar. Does anyone claim that for the sake of state funds from anywhere osar become mutor? To the Prophetary of Henry Navarre is attributed that cynical remark that Paris is worth a mass. He meant to say: Paris vaut bien une messe? We do not justify the dereliction of religious principles for the sake of material gain or of social and cultural acceptance.

I believe that we had no right to box our selves into the government funds corridor, that we should never have created structures which so depend on government funds that we have to compromise our attitudes and postures. If gay groups are abhorrent to us as Torah Jews, we have to be willing to sacrifice our government funds in order to reject them and re fuse them a forum in our midst. At the very least, the question requires serious halachic analysis by the greatest poskim of our time. Certainly we cannot say the contract we have with the government demands that we allow it even minimally, that we tolerate it even minimally.

The argument has been proffered that the halacha acknowledges the special needs of the after-the-fact bedi’eved situation and that halacha allows greater leniency after the fact than before the fact. And isn’t a classic example of this principle the instance of great loss of monies, what is called “hefre merubah?” Of course it is, and of course there are differences in the halachah between lechatchila and bedi’eved. But not every bedi’eved changes the halacha.

Nearly every Jew who emigrated here at the turn of the century and was compelled to support his family by taking a job which required Shabbos work, felt the terrible pressure to give up his chosen Torah life. He did not ask poskim, he did not feel compelled to live on bread and water. He did not deal with the unacceptable, and historically and jurisprudentially (this describes the analysis of the halachic para graph. He speaks, of course, of academic freedom, of “the unfettered pursuit of knowledge and truth, including truths about human nature and seriousness of purpose.” From a secular faculty member’s point of view, freedom of thought, inquiry, study, speech and writing weigh heavily; they help to take the measure of a true university.”

But YU is not a siamese twin with two heads and one heart. YU was a yeshiva first and, after the advent of the college, continues to be a yeshiva foremost. Rav Dr. Lamm insists that the yeshiva is the heart of YU. Then he is the keeper of our heartbeat. YU is a yeshiva at which there is a college.

YU has many branches, like a tree. And, like a tree, it has a history, it has roots. In the Chapters of the Fathers (3,22) it is written: “He (Rabbis Elazar ben Azariah) said: He who creates a name for himself is like a tree whose branches are many but whose roots are few. The wind comes uproots it and overturns it upon its top. Of such a man it is said that he shall not stand in the wasteland and shall not see when good comes...” But he whose deeds exceed his wisdom is like a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are many. And YU has many branches, like a tree whose roots are many and deep. We want to guarantee that no matter how hard the winds blow, the tree will remain true, steadfast in its purpose and confident in its vision.

YU may have many populations, but it has only one halacha. YU may seek to make the halacha relevant to all, but not at the expense of redeeming and maintaining the purest, most authentic parameters of halachic relevance. And Torah provides YU with its weltanschauung, not Proust or Kant or any modern philosopher. And not even Albert Einstein or Shimon Peres can lend us their world-views. Subjects they provide, world-views they cannot.

I do not think that the appointment of two writers who had undertaken a study of the Rav’s philosophical essays in search of a revolutionary thought. They concluded, instead, that the Rav was merely old wine in new bottles. The Rav was a de canted of the very same Torah-wine which he inherited from his Brisk forefathers. What a fraudulent inaccuracy! The Rav who learned from something really new, really insurgent, theyNG! They had wa tered their time. Had they come to me first, I could have saved them from the confusion of telling them that it could not be otherwise. The Rav’s Torah was authentic, so it had to be the same Torah. In all the languages which he had mastered, in all the eras in which he lived, it was the same Torah. In the prisms of all the philosophies which the Rav had studied, the Torah still refracted Abaye and Rava, Rav Saadiah, Maimonides, Kook, Chaim, Shem and the Nesivos, the Gaon of Vilna and Reb Chayim of Brisk. The Rav had a massorah of Torah erudition, of lomdus. It was the same Torah. In the prisms of all the philosophies which the Rav had studied, the Torah still refracted Abaye and Rava, Rav Saadiah, Maimonides, Kook, Chaim, Shem and the Nesivos, the Gaon of Vilna and Reb Chayim of Brisk. The Rav had a massorah of Torah erudition, of lomdus. It was the same Torah.
By Temmi Lattin

Launched in February 2019, the Chinese-Jewish Conversation (CJC) is a landmark program at Yeshiva University. Opening strong this semester with two lectures by Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen, the CJC partnered with Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies and The Katz School of Science and Health to present “Introduction to Jewish Thought from Beijing and the World,” and “The University Complex is Under Jewish Auspices. There may be Advantages to the YU Community who we might not necessarily have contact with on a day to day basis to hear about Judaism from their perspective.”

Dr. Mordechai Cohen, a professor at Stern College and Associate Dean at Revel, spearheaded this program after teaching in Shandong University for the last four years and seeing the shared values, traditions and challenges of Chinese and Jewish communities and cultures.

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Chinese-Jewish Program Encourages Cross-Cultural Conversation

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After attending the event on the 28th, Adina Bruce (SCW ‘21) said, “It was fascinating to see the axis of overlap between Jewish texts and Chinese philosophy and really interesting to be able to share a space with a demographic within the YU community we might not necessarily have contact with on a day to day basis to hear about Judaism from their perspective.”

Dr. Mordechai Cohen, a professor at Stern College and Associate Dean at Revel, spearheaded this program after teaching in Shandong University for the last four years and seeing the shared values, traditions and challenges of Chinese and Jewish communities and cultures.

Four years and seeing the shared values, traditions and challenges of Chinese and Jewish communities and cultures. These include valuing family, education, community and a historical tradition that stems from textual sources of different things can be done within the CJC framework. In the spring, we’re planning a lecture on environmental protection — in the mode of China and as mandated by Torah law. We’re also looking into hosting an event about the program, including more informal get-togethers with both groups of students as well as the potential for new courses if students show interest, including a language course in Mandarin Chinese.

Dr. Cohen pointed out that this initiative, currently in its early stage, “is like other YU programs, such as the Rabbi Arthur Schniezer Program for International Affairs. It isn’t tied to any specific YU school. It’s independent, with its own website, activities and budget. Whether furthering education about Holocaust survivors’ experiences in China and comparing ancient Chinese and Biblical archeology or exploring similarities with Sefer Ezra and Confucius, The Chinese Jewish Conversation is poised to have a significant impact on global conversations while furthering YU’s mission of Torah U’Madda.”

During the inaugural event in February 2019, Shang Guan Shun, a student studying Quantitative Economics at the Katz school, spoke about a teacher from China who “always taught that philosophy helps us live a better life and when it comes to Chinese philosophy like Confucianism … we should develop what’s useful and healthy and discard that which is not and we should not ignore Western philosophy. His words remind me of our university’s motto: Torah and secular knowledge, combining academic education with the study of the Torah.” She described leaving her home in China to come to America and craving “the traditional spirit that is part of [her] blood” but also getting involved in a different world and becoming more tolerant, open-minded, and respectful of the differences between different people and cultures in a global society. Shang Guan Shun ended off with a wish for the university community to “be more tolerant, open-minded and caring Dr. Lee understands.

Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen is a landmark in the Chinese-Jewish conversation.

Features

For more information and to get involved, students can reach Dr. Cohen at cohenn@gwu.edu. Dr. Mordechai Cohen, Mr. Shun Shang Guan and Dr. Roger Ames with students from the Katz School of Science and Health and Stern College for Women at a CJC event.
HAPPY Chanukah
AND GOOD LUCK ON YOUR FINALS!
FROM JQY

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SUPPORTING & EMPOWERING JEWISH LGBTQ YOUTH FROM ORTHODOX HOMES
Bob Dylan: A League of His Own

BY YOSEF ROSENFIELD

I needed a reminder. We all do. Because it's easy to get lost in 21st-century pop music and forget that Bob Dylan is the most influential solo artist of all time. On Dec. 5, I attended a Dylan concert at the Beacon Theatre in New York City. True to his ever-changing performance style, in a 19-song set that predominantly drew from albums "Time Out of Mind," "Tempest" and "Highway 61 Revisited," Dylan repeated only three songs from when I last saw him in 2016.

It was during this concert that Dylan reminded me of my perhaps-unpopular opinion that he is among the greatest singers in the history of recorded music. During songs such as "It Ain't Me Babe" and "Not Dark Yet," he showcased his signature spacing of words and syllables, articulation and intonation, adding meaningful nuance and detail to his vocal performances that I would argue few — if any — other singers have ever communicated or even attempted. Is Dylan one of the best singers of all time? No, not even close. Being a skilled singer is distinctly different from being an iconic one, and even I — a singer-songwriter who idolizes Dylan's work — would never look to his vocal style for useful singing techniques. But that shouldn't detract from Dylan's legendary songs and how his uniquely Dylanesque vocal approach has canonized those songs in the annals of timeless music.

The other aspect of Dylan's performance that impressed me to the point of surprise was his poetry. During a few of his songs, namely "Things Have Changed" and "Make You Feel My Love," it seemed like one lyric after another just blew me away — including lyrics I anticipated and was almost singing along with him. I would hear an exquisitely arranged string of words come out of his mouth and think: man, I wish I wrote something that clever... This, of course, is an irrational fantasy; the truth is Bob Dylan is in a league of his own. After all, this is a man who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016 — as a songwriter. Still, watching Dylan in person, I welcomed the reminder of how poetic his lyricism has always been and just how much I owe to his influences on my own songwriting.

For me, the greatest moment of the entire show was witnessing Dylan come back on stage to play two encores, "Ballad of a Thin Man" and "It Takes A Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry," both from "Highway 61 Revisited." Putting nostalgia itself aside, knowing that I grew up on these songs just the same as the couples in their 50s, 60s and 70s who surrounded me — and now, together with these people from a completely different era of music and history, seeing Bob Dylan play those very songs — fueled a moment of incredible awe and admiration that will likely last longer than any of my other memories of Bob Dylan, both from the past and those I anticipate experiencing in the future.

Tel Aviv University Sackler School of Medicine

New York State/American Program

The Tel Aviv University Sackler School of Medicine—New York State/American Program offers an outstanding four year medical school curriculum, taught in English, leading to the M.D. degree. The Program is chartered by the Regents of the University of the State of New York and is accredited by the State of Israel.

Students do their clerkships and electives in hospitals in Israel, U.S. and Canada. One of these hospitals, Sheba Medical Center, was selected by Newsweek magazine as one of the top 10 hospitals around the world.

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Bioethics in Practice

Can Producers Leave Out Details to Gain Consumers — The Effects of Juul’s Marketing

By Shlomit Ebbin

We’ve all heard of the Juul, whether we’ve seen the flash drive-like product on the streets, the murky vapor produced by someone in our dorm, or we own one ourselves. While Juuling was created to wean adult smokers off of cigarettes, there are those that claim that it, in fact, wasn’t marketed that way; rather, it targeted teens and young adults who weren’t already smokers. Additionally, they claim that the true health cost of Juuling wasn’t sufficiently publicized, causing many people to get sick and even die due to vaping related diseases. Is Juul directly responsible for these deaths, and for causing a generation of teenagers to become addicted to nicotine?

Juul is a vaping product created by Adam Bowen and James Monsees as an alternative to smoking. Both were smokers themselves, and decided there had to be a safe and easy way to stop smoking. Their website states that their mission is to “improve the lives of the world’s one billion smokers by eliminating cigarettes.” They realized that the Juul had to contain a higher percentage of nicotine than other products claiming to help smokers wean themselves. While Juuling was created to wean adult smokers off of cigarettes, there are those that claim that it, in fact, wasn’t marketed that way.

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While the use of Juul has been proven beneficial to some cigarette smokers, the product itself is not entirely danger-free. Michael Blaha, M.D., M.P.H., the director of clinical research at the Johns Hopkins Ciccarone Center for the Prevention of Heart Disease, shares that “vaping is less harmful to the heart than smoking, but it’s still not safe.” Juuls have 5% nicotine in their e-liquid, which is more than double the amount of other vaping products. Each Juul pod contains nicotine as a pack of cigarettes, absorbed into the bloodstream and makes the vapor less harsh so that it is easier to inhale more nicotine for longer periods of time. The higher dose of nicotine increases the risk of addiction, not to mention that it increases blood pressure and heart rate. In rare cases, this can lead to heart failure, but a person who vapes long term may be looking at serious medical problems, such as lung disease and chronic bronchitis. With this product being such a new phenomenon, it’s hard to say exactly what the long-lasting effects are; however, new research is showing that there is more danger than the Juul Company is letting on.

The Juul Company is currently facing numerous lawsuits in several states based on allegations of deceptive marketing. The plaintiffs allege that the Juul Company is letting on. "Juul's remarkable rise to resurrect and dominate the e-cigarette business came after the government tightened regulations on vaping," James Monsee, the co-founder of the company, insisted they “never wanted to target young adults and teens. An article published in the New York Times claimed that “Juul’s remarkable rise to resurrect and dominate the e-cigarette business came after the government tightened regulations on vaping,” James Monsee, the co-founder of the company, insisted they “never wanted to target young adults and teens.

The Juul Company is trying to save face amid all the allegations placed against it, claiming that Juul is doing more good than harm. The prohibition of geneivat da’at includes deception, cheating and creating a false impression. While they might be safer than cigarettes, Juuls are certainly not harmless. And the “coolness” factor of Juuls looks like a stumbling block placed in the way of many trying to quit smoking.

A man using a Juul device

The Juul Company is trying to save face amid all the allegations placed against it, claiming that Juul is doing more good than harm. The prohibition of geneivat da’at includes deception, cheating and creating a false impression. While they might be safer than cigarettes, Juuls are certainly not harmless. And the “coolness” factor of Juuls looks like a stumbling block placed in the way of many trying to quit smoking.
Commentator Library Survey: A Comprehensive Analysis

By Yosef Lemel

Editor's Note: For the purposes of this article, “satisfied” refers to students who indicated that they are “satisfied” or “extremely satisfied,” and “dissatisfied” refers to students who indicated that they are either “dissatisfied” or “extremely dissatisfied.” “Comfortable” refers to students who indicated that they are either “comfortable” or “extremely comfortable,” and “uncomfortable” refers to students who indicated that they are either “uncomfortable” or “extremely uncomfortable.”

The Commentator recently conducted a survey on a variety of issues relating to experiences of students in YU’s two libraries on the undergraduate campuses, the Mendel Gottesman Library on the Wilf Campus and the Hedi Steinberg Library on the Beren Campus. This article presents a detailed breakdown of the results.

INTRODUCTION

Overall, the survey of the YU libraries polled 399 undergraduate YU students, or 16% of the total undergraduate student body on the Wilf and Beren campuses. 137 respondents (44%) are Yeshiva College (YC) students, 95 (31%) are Stern College for Women (SCW) students, 57 (18%) are male Sy Syms School of Business (Syms-Men) students, 18 (6%) are female Sy Syms School of Business (Syms-Women) students and 2 (1%) are Katz School students.

102 respondents (33%) are in their first year on campus, 92 (30%) in their second year, 84 (27%) in their third year and 31 (10%) in their fourth year or beyond.

Of the male respondents, 126 (65%) attend the Mazer Yeshiva Program (MYP), 32 (17%) attend the Irwin R. Cohen B’nai Jeshurun (IRCB) Program, 29 (15%) attend the Isaac Breuer School (IBC) and 6 (3%) attend the James Striar School (JSS).

Specific conclusions were not drawn from the results of some groups in YU with a low sample size, such as respondents from Syms-Women, Katz School, IRCB and JSS.

SURVEY RESULTS

Both men and women are generally comfortable with students of the opposite gender studying in the library on their respective campus. 65% of men feel comfortable and 17% feel neither comfortable nor uncomfortable with women studying in the uptown library. Last year’s Commentator Spring Survey also found that 65% of men feel comfortable with women studying in the uptown library. This year, 56% of MYP students expressed comfortability with women in the uptown library and 23% feel neither comfortable nor uncomfortable. 65% of YC students feel comfortable and 15% feel neither comfortable nor uncomfortable with women studying in the uptown library. 56% of Syms-Men feel comfortable and 53% feel neither comfortable nor uncomfortable. Women generally feel comfortable with men studying in the Hedi Steinberg Library. 54% of women feel comfortable with men studying in the downtown library and 31% feel neither comfortable nor uncomfortable. Last year, 81% of women indicated that they were comfortable with men studying in the library on the Beren Campus. 21% of men see women in the library as distractions, compared with 28% of respondents from Syms-Men.

46% of women expressed that they have avoided studying in the uptown library due to the fear of being objectified. 30% of female first-year students have avoided studying in the uptown library due to fear of objectification compared to 49% of second, third and fourth-year students.

Overall, 92% of students believe that men generally use the library to study, compared to 82% who believe the same about women. When broken down by gender, 93% of men and 91% of women believe that men generally use the library to study. 79% of men and 86% of women believe that women generally use the library to study. Compared to women frequently visit the Wilf library to study.

47% of all undergraduates visit the Wilf library at least a few times per week, while 30% visit once a month or less. While 72% of men visit the Wilf library at least a few times per week, only 5% of women do so. 70% of women visit the Wilf library once a month or less, with 28% saying that they never visited the Wilf library.

The most frequently visited floor in the Beren library is floor 2, with 33% of respondents frequently visiting it. 32% and 29% frequently visit the reserve library and the 1st floor, respectively.

51% of students expressed overall satisfaction with the Beren library. 50% were satisfied with the conduciveness for study. 20% and 25% of students were dissatisfied with the library computers and printers, respectively. 54% of students frequently use the Beren library to study alone compared to 29% of students to use library computers and 6% to socialize. 11% to use library computers and printers, respectively.

Students were generally satisfied with library services provided in the Wilf library. 85% of students expressed overall satisfaction. 75% are satisfied with the conduciveness for study in the Wilf library. Only 6% and 5% of students expressed dissatisfaction with the Wilf library computers and printers, respectively.

20% and 25% of students were dissatisfied with the Wilf library.

68% of YC students, 42% of SCW students and 30% of Syms-Men say they have taken a book out. Only 13% of students have used YU’s Interlibrary Loan Service. 13% of SCW students, 13% of YC students and 7% of Syms-Men have used the Interlibrary Loan Service.

METHODOLOGY

We mostly followed the methodology of the surveys conducted last year by The Commentator. As before, we reached out to students via ystud/sstud emails and posted flyers in both the Wilf and Beren libraries encouraging students to sign up for the survey, gathering a total of 357 interested undergraduate students. We conducted a raffle with a $75 Amazon gift card as the first place prize to motivate respondents. We also confirmed that respondents were current undergraduate students with YU’s Office of Student Life. Unlike last year, we did not send out emails to professors asking them to encourage students to sign up. The survey was conducted through SurveyMonkey. All responses were completely anonymous.

There were several confounding factors that could have skewed the results of the survey one way or the other. For example, while students in Syms-Men comprise 27% of the undergraduate student body, 18% of our respondents were from Syms-Men. Similarly, while students in SCW comprise 39% of the undergraduates, 31% of our survey was comprised of SCW students. YC students were over-represented in our survey with 44% of respondents being students in YC, while only comprising 24% of the undergraduate student body.

46% of women expressed that they have avoided studying in the uptown library due to the fear of being objectified.
Year in Review of Commentator News: 2019

By Yossi Zimilover

As 2019 winds down, The Commentator has compiled a list of some of the most important and popular stories we reported on this year.

February 14 - Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz Hired as RIETS Director of Semikha Program
It was announced that Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz would become the Director of Semikha at RIETS beginning this fall. Rabbi Lebowitz is the rabbi of Beis HaKnesses of North Woodmere and a popular educator. He has over 8,000 shiurim uploaded on YUTorah, the most of anyone on the site. Before returning to YU, Rabbi Lebowitz most recently held the role of Senior Magid Shiur at Lander College for Men.

February 16-17 - Uptown Coed Shabbaton Takes Place on Wilf Campus
For the first time in nearly 40 years, a coed Shabbaton took place on the Wilf Campus, despite a statement from Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman that en enrollment would become the Dean of the Sy Syms School of Business, starting in May. Wasserman is also slated to make a situm on Shas at this year’s Chanukah concert.

April 4 - “Volozhin Yeshiva” Survey Email Ruffles Feathers
Hundreds of male students received emails from a group of anonymous students called the “Volozhin Yeshiva” asking them to fill out an anonymous form regarding potentially “objective halachic or hashkafik issues found within courses.” The course evaluation form was sent out without any knowledge from the RIETS administration and was met with particular disapproval from the YC Deans.

August 25 - University Sued by Nearly 40 Former Students Alleging Abuse
After New York State passed the Child Victims Act, 38 former students sued YU for allegedly turning a blind eye to sexual abuse that took place at Yeshiva University High School for Boys, between 1955 and 1986.

September 9 - YU Drops to 24-year Low in U.S. News and World Report Rankings
YU dropped to 97th place in the U.S. News and World Report Annual Rankings of national universities. Last year, YU was ranked 90th. The rating marked a 24 year low for Yeshiva.

September 15 - Students, Allies and Activists March for LGBTQ Equality
A group of over 100 YU students, alumni, LGBTQ allies and activists marched in Washington Heights and in front of the Gottesman Library in support of LGBTQ equality and representation on campus. The march was organized by the YU College Democrats club without official YU approval, together with Eshe and JQY.

September 22 - Third Giving Day Raises 85.7 Million Despite Steep Drop in Number of Donors
YU’s third annual Giving Day raised over $5.7 million from 1156 donors, exceeding its $5 million goal. However, the total number of donors fell 61% from last year’s campaign.

September 26 - Student Council Presidents Reinstate YU College Democrats
The YU College Democrats were originally rejected as an official club for the 2019-2020 academic year by the Yeshiva Student Union (YCU) and Stern College for Women Student Council (SCWSC) student governments, but after a joint statement was issued by all the YU student council presidents, the decision was reversed.

November 29 - Meal Plan Changes Reversed Following Student Backlash
The restructuring of this year’s dining plan was undone after students expressed their displeasure with the changes and the administration admitted their failure at informational meetings on the Beren and Wilf campuses.

December 5 - University Cited for Dozens of Building, Elevator Violations Over Past 3 Years
The Commentator learned that dozens of building code violations have been issued to YU in the past three years, largely stemming from elevator issues on both the Beren and Wilf campuses.

December 12 - University Announces Raising $5.7 Million Despite Steep Drop in Number of Donors
$5.7 million from 1156 donors, exceeding its $5 million goal. However, the total number of donors fell 61% from last year’s campaign.

May 19 - Leah Adler, Beloved and Respected Head Librarian, Dies at 77
Cantor Sherwood Goffin, a teacher of Jewish Liturgy and Folk Music since 1987 at Yeshiva University’s Belz School of Jewish Music, died on Wednesday, April 3. He was also the cantor of Lincoln Square Synagogue on Manhattan’s West Side from its founding in 1965 until 2016.

May 20 - Students, Allies and Activists March for LGBTQ Equality
A group of over 100 YU students, alumni, LGBTQ allies and activists marched in Washington Heights and in front of the Gottesman Library in support of LGBTQ equality and representation on campus. The march was organized by the YU College Democrats club without official YU approval, together with Eshe and JQY.

October 4 - Bob Tufts, Syms Professor, Passes Away at 63 after Long Cancer Battle
Former Syms School of Business Professor Robert “Bob” Tufts died on October 4. A former major league baseball pitcher, Tufts served as a clinical assistant professor in the Strategy and Entrepreneurship Department and was named the Lillian and William Silber Professor of the Year in the 2017-2018 academic year.
The Art of Being Invisible

By Mayer Fink

On December 3rd, in the midst of the football season, the Carolina Panthers fired head coach Ron Rivera. Ron Rivera is the second coach to be fired before the end of the season (Jay Gruden lost his job following an 0-5 start to Washington’s season) and is expected to be one of many coaches that will be fired by the end of the season. We hear about coaches on the hotseat. After every Sunday, we hear on sports commentaries which coaches are expected to be fired and which coaches should be in fear of losing their jobs. One thing we don’t hear often is which coaches are on the “cold seat,” which coaches have the safest job security and don’t have to worry about getting fired.

A Super Bowl victory does bolster job security among head coaches. Pete Carroll has kept the Super Bowl mentality in the Seahawks to bottom out and finish last in the division that season. Despite a roster stripped of its championship ship in the 2010 season. Why are some coaches able to remain invisible? How are they able to avoid the pressure from the media and fans and keep their jobs for as long as they have? There are three common tendencies within the five coaches mentioned above. There is no exact science to success in the NFL, but there are some common trends which can go unnoticed by the common fan.

Never tank: always be competitive.

It’s a cliche in the NFL to always be competitive. Every coach will say that they are trying to win every game. Few coaches can remain competitive regardless of the circumstances. It has been common in the NFL for teams to “tank” or purposely lose for draft position. The best head coaches will never relay that message to their team, even one with a depleted roster. In an era of “selling out”, the teams that are “buying in” are winning.

Last off-season the Seahawks lost some key players from their Super Bowl team in the 2013 season. Most fans expected the Seahawks to bottom out and finish last in the division in hopes of being a better team in the future years. Not Pete Carroll. Carroll made sure the Seahawks were competitive that season. Despite a roster stripped of its championship talent, the Seahawks managed to make the playoffs last season. Pete Carroll has kept the Super Bowl mentality in Seattle and the Seahawks are back to being contenders as they boast one of the best records in the NFL this season.

Similarly, this off-season can be classified as the worst in the Mike Tomlin era in Pittsburgh. The team lost All-Pro running back Le’Veon Bell, All-Pro wide receiver Antonio Brown, and other key pieces of what has been part of the Steelers success in recent years. To make matters worse, future Hall-of-Fame quarterback Ben Roethlisberger suffered an elbow injury in the second game of the season to sideline him for the year (the team fell to 0-3 the following week). Many thought the Steelers would finish last in the division. Mike Tomlin dismissed any thought of that following the week two loss as they wired their first round draft pick in exchange for defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick. Mike Tomlin has proven in his tenure in Pittsburgh that it’s not in his mentality to lose, leading the Steelers to a 3-0 record or above every season. Mike Tomlin has not only guided the team to an 8-5 record (as of Tuesday night 12/10/2019), he has done so with a third string quarterback, Devlin Hodges, and a third string running back.

Always Adapt.

The NFL is a league of trends. Whether it’s the no-huddle offense or the 46 defense, the league is full of innovators and copycats. The coaches that last in the NFL are the ones who not only outlast the trends but are able to adapt with them.

What makes Bill Belichick’s 19 year tenure with the Patriots so impressive is that throughout his time in New England many trends have come and gone, yet he remains. Belichick has not only withstood some of the trends that other coaches have tried to implement, he has also started some of his own. Belichick will probably go down as one of the greatest preparation coaches the league has seen, and the idea that you win a game in practice has been emboldened in New England.

Last year, John Harbaugh had to make a gutsy decision that resulted in him securing his job for the foreseeable future. He was faced with the dilemma of keeping traditional pocket-passing quarterback Joe Flacco as the starter or going with the young, raw dual-threat quarterback in rookie Lamar Jackson. The decision to switch to Lamar Jackson changed the Ravens offense and since the change at quarterback the Ravens have been one of the best teams in the NFL.

The great coaches not only know what trends to follow, but also are the innovators of the league. The coaches that are two, three steps ahead of everyone else are the ones that keep their jobs. Great coaches also know when to make a risky decision and when not to. Many coaches are considered risky when they go for it on fourth down or surprise the other team with an onside kick in the middle of the game, but many risky decisions are also made off the field with the staff and personnel.

Have good relationships not only with the ownership/management but also the players.

Don’t let the sideline look of Bill Belichick wearing a hoodie and sweatpants fool you. He is a football genius but he also runs the team like a CEO runs a company. Everyone who goes to New England knows that they are playing for Bill Belichick and his system, not for themselves.

When Charlie Caserly was the general manager in Washington, he would only draft players that he knew. Joe Gibbs wanted to coach, the result was three Super Bowl championships in nine seasons with a group of players that were capable of playing not only with coach Gibbs but with each other as well.

Now, most coaches don’t have complete control of who they bring in. Part of the difficulty in being a head coach is having a strong chemistry with the player hierarchy on the team. A common phrase heard in the sports world is that a coach “lost the locker room,” meaning they lost the respect and control of their team. New coaches have the extra difficulty of winning over the players who not only have been playing football their whole life but have likely been in the organization for longer than the coach who just got hired. This has resulted in searches for coaches who can understand and relate to the players on the roster. Pete Carroll is most notable for being a successful “players coach” in recent years. While he has let his players be more vocal and independent, he has had the final say in team actions and team activities.

Coaches have the extra difficulty of dealing with the owners and management of the team who are above them in power. A good relationship with an owner can be the strongest component for a coach being able to keep his job. Marvin Lewis coached the Bengals for 16 seasons and never won a playoff game, while Jim Harbaugh went to three NFC Championships in his first three seasons with the 49ers only to be fired after his fourth season with the team. Both coaches had to deal with different owners; one was patient and had a good relationship with his coach and the other got into a power struggle with the general manager and the owner. Just like every locker room is different, every owner and general manager is different. The coaches that last are able to figure out how to win over both.

It’s hard to know the exact science behind the ideal coach. One thing is common, though — winning makes everything better. The teams that will begin their coaching searches this offseason will hope to find the next great coach. They should look into the coaches that have been great in recent years to find commonalities that make coaches great.
An Interview with Dr. Dara Horn

By Michelle Naim

The Dara Horns of this world don’t come around too often. As the Straus Center’s Distinguished Visiting Scholar for the 2019-2020 academic year, she teaches a course called “When Bad Things Happen to Good People: Divine Justice and Human Creativity,” which meets for four hours every week and spans two full blocks on the schedule. She has eight people in the class. Horn doesn’t plan her books; “I’m writing them the way you’re reading them,” she said. She may write up to 1500 words a day only to throw out the whole lot afterward (it’s a skill she said she’s honed over the last 20 years).

The five-time novelist was sharp and honest when she said, “writing is not a career choice, it’s a chronic illness.” It doesn’t matter to her if the work is good or not, but only that she is generating words. “That happens,” she said. “That’s part of the creative process. Not everything works out the way you’d hope it would.”

“You were hoping for a little quote where you could say ‘she went to Ramaz,’” she told me when I interviewed her. I actually wasn’t. Hearing that Dara Horn had gone through the public-school system and then took time to educate herself in yeshiva classes at a local JCC (she was the only one not retired, and her nickname in the class was ‘Moshe’), was a breath of fresh air.

She is the “weird exception to the Pew survey.” Horn currently lives in Short Hills, New Jersey, where she also grew up. She has reached dozens of readers from various backgrounds and her informal Jewish education gave her the tools to package Jewish ideas for anyone. Unlike other children who attended synagogue Hebrew schools, Horn actually learned something from the one she attended, she said.

Horn graduated with a PhD in comparative literature from Harvard University in 2006. She studied Hebrew and Yiddish literature, and although her class at Stern College for Women is listed under the English department, most of the works she teaches are in Yiddish or Hebrew (one was originally written in German).

Horn has previously taught classes at Sarah Lawrence College and City University of New York in Jewish literature and Israeli History. She was also a visiting Professor at Harvard University where she taught Hebrew and Yiddish literature.

“I’ve taught in many different contexts — adult education, high school, graduate studies — this is the best class I’ve ever taught!” she said about the class she teaches at Stern. But these intellectually rigorous institutions have got nothing on YU. “I’ve felt that at other places I’ve taught, the seminar discussion is about people trying to impress me. No one is trying to impress me here, or if they are, they’re just succeeding and I’m a chump,” she quipped.

She also added that the mere fact that she is teaching at a Jewish college means that many students understand the biblical/prophetic references in the literature they discuss. “YU students are the readers who these texts are meant for,” she continued.

Horn comes from a long line of Jewish educators. Her mother got a doctorate in Jewish education and her family grew up bringing the holidays alive — acting out the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim by redoing their house on Passover into a “Plague House of Horrors,” which takes participants through the Horn’s papered basement. Her son pops out and slaughters the first born, then participants go through and “there’s 500 yards of blue yarn hanging from the ceiling and one of my other sons is there and he’s dressed as Moshe and he’s leading you through the red sea as you part this yarn,” she explained with excitement.

Horn always thought about Judaism through the prism of creativity — whether that be the plays she and her family enact or their “Plague House of Horrors.”

When she read books with references to Tanach and Gemara, she was amazed at their depth.

“So I read that book and I was amazed. ‘Yay. This is what I always thought of Judaism. It’s like the Bible. It’s not dry. It’s this living book. It’s this thing that’s relevant to today.’”

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“Now I think it’s different,” she said. “But there was this thinness to the American Jewish literature that I grew up with which was all about Judaism as a social identity, it was not anything about the content of this tradition and I was like ‘wouldn’t it be cool to have this in English.’” So that’s what she wrote her novels about.

Judaism, to Horn, is the opposite of the American dream. Judaism is not about the individual, no matter how many lines of “If I am not for myself, who will be for me” lines exist in Jewish literature.

“Actually, the most important thing in your life happened thousands of years ago, there’s nothing you can do about it... Everything about Jewish life is about reliving the past and that the past isn’t even the past. Everything is this endless spiral.”

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Assessing the UK Election and its Significance for Jews Everywhere

By Daniel Melool

On Dec. 12, the United Kingdom held a general election for the third time in just five years. The election resulted in the Conservative Party, led by incumbent Prime Minister Boris Johnson, maintaining its hold on the United Kingdom’s parliament and increasing its seat count with a net gain of 66 seats to secure 365 of the 650 seats in the House of Commons — nearly 40 more than the necessary 266 required to form a government. The opposition Labour Party, led by Jeremy Corbyn, suffered a net loss of 42 seats, decreasing its share of seats from 262 to 203 in the party’s worst performance since 1935. For the Conservatives, this election was the party’s biggest victory since the re-election of Margaret Thatcher in 1992.

The election was a victory for supporters of Brexit. The Conservative Party, under the leadership and direction of Boris Johnson, had made leaving the European Union a big part of their campaign — to the point of making their official mantra “Get Brexit done.” When the British public voted to leave the European Union in June of 2016, the parties have failed to reach an agreement that would see the UK leave the European Union. Markets hate uncertainty, but they would have hated a Corbyn government a lot more.”

The contours of the election were set by the Brexit movement. In 2012, Corbyn appeared on Iran’s state television and said, “It seems a bit unlikely that it would happen during Ramadan, to put it mildly, and I suspect the hand of Israel in this whole process of destabilisation.” In 2013, Corbyn traveled to Tunisia and participated in a wreath-laying ceremony for the terrorists who murdered eleven Israelis at the Bardo Museum in 2015. When I attend a memorial, my presence alone, whatever I lay a wreath or not, demonstrates my association and support. There can also never be a ‘fitting memorial’ for terrorists. Where is the apology?”

The election was a victory for supporters of Brexit. The Conservative Party would win a general election. Neil Wilson, an analyst at Markets.com, remarked, “The exit poll shows a whopping victory for the Conservatives and the perfect result for the market and for business. Markets hate uncertainty, but they would have hated a Corbyn government a lot more.”

However, without any doubt, the biggest winner of this election is the Jewish community, not just in England, but worldwide.

The controversy surrounding Corbyn drew comments from people who usually refrain from speaking about politics publicly. Former Chief Rabbi of England Jonathan Sacks said in an interview with the New Statesman in 2018 that Corbyn is “an anti-Semite” who has lent support to “racists, terrorists and dealers of death.” The comment was the first time Rabbi Sacks has issued a political statement in his 30 years in public life. Rabbi Sacks was also asked on the BBC if he knew any Jews who were seriously considering leaving Britain if Corbyn became the next prime minister, and responded with, “of course.”

Indeed, a poll commissioned by the Jewish Leadership Council and shared with The Times of Israel found that 47% of Jews in the U.K. would “seriously consider” emigrating if Corbyn won, and 87% considered Corbyn anti-Semitic. The current Chief Rabbi of England, Ephraim Mirvis, in an unprecedented move, warned that the “very soul of our nation is at stake.” Assessing the way Labour has handled allegations of anti-Semitism, Rabbi Mirvis said, “The only way in which the leadership of the Labour Party has dealt with anti-Semitic racism is incompatible with the British values of which we are so proud - of dignity and respect for all people. It has left many decent Labour members and parliamentarians, both Jewish and non-Jewish, ashamed of what has transpired.”

Following those thrilling days of the summer season, the winter months, the movies that come out are more calmer, quieter, more intimate films that pull us away from the world. Moving into the winter months, the movies that come out are calmer, quieter, more intimate films that pull us away from the world.

And as the Credits Roll: My Top Ten Movies of the Year

By Josh Leichter

It’s that time of year again. As the seasons begin to change and turn more subdued, the films released seem to mimic this pattern. Following those thrilling days of the summer season that brought us enjoyable popcorn flicks like “Spider-Man: Far from Home”, “Toy Story 4” and of course “Avengers: Endgame”, there is a noticeable lull. Moving into the winter months, the movies that come out are calmer, quieter, more intimate films that pull us away from the world.

“The Irishman” (Netflix): A story that spans five decades, this film takes us through the life of Frank Sheeran, a mobster from Philadelphia, and dives into his relationship with the mafia and influential union boss, Jimmy Hoffa. Playing the legendary Martin Scorcese and populated with screen legends Robert De Niro, Joe Pesci and Al Pacino acting together for the first time since Goodfellas, “The Irishman” told a story that almost 50 years ago was a sight to behold. While the film runs long at 3 hours and 30 minutes, not a moment feels unwarranted. Scorcese chooses to tell the story from a different side of the mafia life, showing us a man who must live with the sins of his younger days. It is currently streaming on Netflix.

“Marriage Story” (Netflix): This semi-autobiographical film directed by Noah Baumbach shows us a couple played by Scarlett Johansen and Adam Driver going through a brutal divorce. What they sought to keep civil soon devolves into a bitter and hostile affair that draws out the worst in both of them. The film’s strength is in the dialogue, performances and the way that it helps us relate to both characters, intentionally making it unclear as to who we are supposed to be supporting. Playing supporting roles are Ray Liotta (“Goodfellas”) and Laura Dern (“Big Little Lies”), whose turns as two high-energy attorneys provide both perspective and humor on just how intense the divorce process can be. It is currently streaming on Netflix.

“Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood” (Sony): Another big-name director making his return to the big screen this year, Quentin Tarantino cast A-list stars Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio in his latest love song to the golden days of Hollywood, with DiCaprio portraying an actor struggling to find work and Pitt as his loyal stuntman and best friend. The film takes us through those “good old days” of Hollywood and features cameos from many real-life celebrities of the time, from Bruce Lee to an incredible supporting turn by Margot Robbie as Sharon Tate. It’s the kind of movie only someone with such a love could make and Tarantino shows he’s the one who could pull it off.

“1917” (Universal): Not since 1998’s “Saving Private Ryan” has there been a war movie so captivating, visceral and gripping.

Continued on Page 20
in showing the horrors of the battlefield. Taking place over the course of a single day and focusing on two soldiers who must give orders to stop an attack that will lead to devastation for the British troops, director Sam Mendes and cinematographer Roger Deakins shot the film to appear as one long take, allowing for the film to have a hypnotic hold over the audience. It never breaks for even a moment, making you feel like you are standing on the battlefield, uncertain of where danger might strike next. It’s an impressive feat that I think will change the way we see films like these, just like how “Private Ryan’s” famous D-Day scene changed the genre over 20 years ago.

“Ad Astra” (Fox/Disney): With a plot that can be described as Apocalypse Now in space, we find ourselves observing a more quiet and contemplative side to Brad Pitt’s acting in a radical departure from his role in Tarantino’s “Once Upon a Time… In Hollywood”. The film takes us through space focusing on the bleakness of being so far from humanity and simply allows us to join Pitt on his mission to discover whether his father is still alive. The film showcases brilliant shots of the space odyssey, but never loses sight of the message at its center: the timeless story of a son that wants nothing more than to reconnect with his father.

“Joker” (Warner Brothers): If there was ever an actor that can transform into a role and truly make it his own, it would be Joaquin Phoenix. In his turn as Joker, he allows himself to contort his body into a masterclass of method acting that I dare say upstages Ledger’s Oscar-winning role in “The Dark Knight”. We, as the audience, see how one man who actively seeks out treatment for his neurological conditions can be completely kicked around in society to the point of breaking. While some were critical of the violence in the film, it opens up the door to having an actual conversation about mental illness and what we can do to help. At the same time, the film breaks the conventions of what a “comic book movie” can be, by elevating its source material and translating it into the real world, one devoid of caped crusaders and flashy armor, where the only heroes are the ones that we allow ourselves to be.

“Ford v. Ferrari” (Fox/Disney): Learning to in the conversation on celebrity acting pairings, James Mangold perfectly nailed it in this film, casting Matt Damon as Carroll Shelby, a car designer and engineer to play alongside Christian Bale, who portrays racing driver Ken Miles. The two play off of each other in a way that makes it a delight to watch, while also having the reader feel like they are there during the famous 1966 Le Mans race, where Ford sought to design a car that could beat the legendary Enzo Ferrari. The movie takes us back to those days when the engineers did not have the modern technology we have nowadays and had to rely on their wit and inventiveness to get the job done.

And as another year fades to black, we find ourselves sitting around with friends, discussing what our favorite movies were this past year.

“Avengers Endgame” (Disney): 22 movies, 11 years and the highest gross ever has shown that Marvel Studios really did accomplish the impossible. No one would have believed that they would be able to pull it off in 2008 with “Iron Man” and take the characters to new heights and development, actually providing a satisfying conclusion to what are now some of the most iconic superheroes in history. To say goodbye to these modern myths can only be said in the same words we heard in the film. We love you, 3000.

“Knives Out” (Lionsgate): An ensemble murder mystery that takes itself too seriously, allowing itself to have fun and riff on the old Agatha Christie novels in what I found to be one of the most surprisingly enjoyable films of the year. As soon as the movie ended, I was eager to watch it all over again to catch everything I missed on the first viewing.

“A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood” (Tristar): In a role that seems as tailor-made as his recognizable sweaters, Tom Hanks transforms into Mr. Fred Rogers and turns out to be one of the greatest performances of his career, as he brought into the world in real life. Unfortunately, the rest of the film struggles to find its footing when Hanks is not on the screen. It’s a shame to see the message of Rogers transform it into the real world, one devoid of caped crusaders and flashy armor, where the only heroes are the ones that we allow ourselves to be.

Who Should Fight Global Warming?

By Noam Gershov

The Democratic Party’s fifth presidential debate was held on November 20 in Atlanta, Georgia. Not surprisingly, every candidate on stage agreed that President Donald Trump must be ousted from office in 2020. Another issue that every candidate agreed must be addressed is that of climate change. Mayor Pete Buttigieg, for instance, described this crisis as a “national emergency,” and Senator Bernie Sanders coined it “an existential threat to our country and the entire planet.” The proposed solution by most candidates includes a combination of increased taxes on greenhouse gas emissions and an implementation of the ambitious Green New Deal, a plan introduced by Congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey that aims to bring carbon emissions to zero and invest in projects that protect the environment. These proposals align with the Democratic ideology of a big, involved government that regulates businesses and spends a lot of money on public problems.

Across the aisle, Republicans also believe, at least in part, that the climate is changing. A Monmouth University poll suggests that 64% of Republicans believe in global warming, but only 25% think it is a very serious problem. Whether climate change is a pressing issue that needs immediate attention or can be put on the back-burner, conservatives generally oppose a powerful government that intervenes to solve our country’s issues. Instead, Republicans encourage individuals and private industries to pursue efforts at stabilizing the environment.

A prime example of a private company and specific individual successfully tackling the problem of climate change is Tesla and its founder, Elon Musk. Established in 2003, the mission of Tesla has stayed consistent throughout: “to prove that electric vehicles can be better, quicker, and more fun than gasoline cars,” and simultaneously, that “the faster the world stops relying on fossil fuels and moves towards a zero-emission future, the better.” Over the years, Tesla has put its money where its mouth is, and as of the end of the second quarter of 2019, 720,000 electric vehicles have been sold globally. This number is quite staggering and is projected to rise exponentially with the recent announcement of the Tesla Cybertruck, which received 146,000 preorders just two days after its reveal.

To meet the energy demands of its electric vehicles while on the road, Tesla created a vast supercharger network that spans roads, highways, rest stops and malls, so the driver never has to worry about running out of battery. Although Tesla is a for-profit business that wants as many people to buy its vehicles as possible, the company has generously offered to allow other electric car manufacturers to create compatible charging outlets and use the Tesla superchargers. This self-sacrifice demonstrates the company’s genuine drive towards achieving a zero-emission future.

In his spare time, Elon Musk participates in other ventures as well, such as SpaceX, which he founded in 2002. The mission of SpaceX is to expand humanity’s presence in space. With a strong focus and drive to become the first habitable colony on Mars, the corporation looks to elicit change on Earth as well. Tesla’s goal is not only to produce electric vehicles, but also to become the gold standard in sustainable energy technology and innovation.

Many other private businesses are also innovating in these fields. And not only are these companies not taxing U.S. citizens or placing restrictions on fossil fuel emissions, but they are concurrently creating great projects with the positive side effect of fighting global warming. Perhaps the Democratic candidates should observe the success of Tesla and other similar companies and realize that under a free market economic system with the proper incentives in place, individuals and private businesses will do the job of solving climate change better and faster than government ever can.
 Seeking Transcendence, Finding Ourselves: A Review of SCDS’s ‘Defying Gravity’

Many of the characters initially seem to fit specific tropes, but upon closer inspection, reveal deeper complexities.

By Aharon Nissel

I could start this review by saying that the Stern College Drama Society’s (SCDS) production of “Defying Gravity” really takes off, or that it was out of this world, or I could make a bad “Wicked” joke (despite the title, this play had nothing to do with the Broadway smash hit). Instead, I’d like to move past all that and get to what’s really going on here. The SCDS production of Jane Anderson’s “Defying Gravity” is simply a delicately durable performance about the vastness of the universe, the tininess of humankind and the beauty we create despite that bifurcation.

The play runs in a free-structured style, oscillating between the 1986 Challenger mission and the present. Non-linear plays are often hard to follow, but that wasn’t an issue here (and anyway, time is relative in space). Many of the characters initially seem to fit specific tropes, but upon closer inspection, reveal deeper complexities. For example, when we first meet the old traveling couple Betty (a tender Shayna Hain) and Ed (Mikki Trieted — with incredible eyebrows), who actively seek out adventures, they seem to be just a quarreling couple going camping. But Betty’s naive innocence is more than a silly personality trait. It inspires us to consider why we do the things we do and what motivates us. The play as a whole is very much an exercise about “space, time and human emotion.”

We have the soft-spoken and eloquent Teacher (Chana Weiss, who just so happens to be teaching about churches and reliquaries), who has been chosen to be the civilian representative sent up on the Challenger space shuttle. Despite being a teacher, she herself has what to learn, especially about parenting. Her young daughter Elizabeth (the powerful Sirit Perl) attests to this with visceral, emotional expressions that are powerful in the way that only a child unadulterated by apathetic adult life or a Monet painting can be. While she may seem like an ill-tempered child at first, Elizabeth really struggles to understand the pressure her mother is under just as much as Teacher fails to understand the pressure Elizabeth is under.

We have the gruff but deeply human NASA engineer C.B. (El Azizollahoff), who drinks a little more than he should, and his girlfriend, the motherly nurturer Donna (Tamar Guterson), who operates a bar near the NASA facilities. Throughout the play, she comforts the characters that need comforting (it’s no coincidence that her name is a play on Madonna), and eventually she herself must face her own challenges with heights, which, while smaller in scale, are no less important.

And of course there’s the man who opens the play, the French Impressionist painter, Monet (a delightful Leah Scheweitz), who anachronistically — but delightfully — joins us throughout the play, interacting with characters who lived decades after his death. The play seeks to draw a parallel between Monet’s artistic pursuits and NASA’s scientific pursuits. In this play, Monet’s sublimity goes beyond his paintings of cathedrals and lilies. He is everywhere he needs to be, simply trying to create beauty and see the world “from God’s view.”

Rocky Pincus and Sara Pool’s set is so perfectly constructed that it blurs the lines between past and present to emphasize the eternal truths that pervade the work. Jane Anderson’s meditative script weaves together a complex tapestry of themes and motifs: God, science, art, the cosmos and most importantly the interplay between them all. It is no coincidence that the Teacher’s projection of the stained glass rose window from Chartres Cathedral hovers above one scene like a planet or that she talks about how the invention of flying buttresses allowed Cathedrals to be built higher than ever before (look out for the many clever references and call-backs within the play). The play as a whole is very much an exercise in taking metaphors and really hashing them out to find the truths that lie within them.

The play challenges us to relate to these bigger themes, and ultimately to each other. The play is about reaching God and clinging to God’s world. Whether you’re a science person or an art person, it’s well worth your time to head over to Schottenstein Theater to see this stellar (sorry, I had to) performance about “space, time and human emotion.”

Whether you’re a science person or an art person, it’s well worth your time to head over to Schottenstein Theater to see this stellar (sorry, I had to) performance about “space, time, and human emotion.”

Opinions
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By Avigail Goldberger and Rachel Retter

The availability heuristic is a mental shortcut which allows us to dwell on fears that are statistically less likely to hurt us than ones we ignore. For example, a person may feel more anxious on a plane than in a car, even though more people die every year in car crashes than in planes. In a similar vein, while much recent media attention has been devoted to documenting anti-vaccination groups with regard to the measles virus, flu vaccination rates have not been as frequently discussed. Of course, the potential dangers of a measles outbreak are not to be minimized. But the fact remains: tens of thousands of Americans die each year of the flu according to the CDC while thankfully, no measles deaths have been recorded in the US since 2015. In fact, according to a survey conducted by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID), 60 percent of Americans “agree” that flu vaccination is the best preventative measure against flu related deaths and hospitalization. Despite this, the CDC reports that less than half of Americans get the flu vaccine in any given year; it is even possible, based on data from recent years, that this number could be on the decline.

Because college students represent the up-and-coming members of society, public health workers often turn to college campuses to investigate and initiate change regarding critical health attitudes. In a 2017 survey conducted by the NFID, 70 percent of college students in the US reported that they believe it is important to get an annual flu vaccine, while only 46 percent stated that they typically get vaccinated.

Among reasons cited for not getting vaccinated were doubts surrounding its efficacy, confidence in one’s own health, needle aversion, financial hesitations, and fear of side effects. While several of these reasons account for the percentage of the population who do not believe it is important to get vaccinated, others provide insight into why people may believe it is important yet still fail to vaccinate. In other words, there are two necessary avenues of attack to increase flu vaccine participation — educating those who see no reason to get vaccinated and facilitating a more comfortable and convenient vaccination process for those who are merely reluctant. Along these lines, the NFID observed that some likely ways to increase participation might include decreasing the financial burden and offering small tangible benefits, such as food or monetary incentive.

In September 2019, Yeshiva University’s chapter of UAID (United Against Inequities in Disease) provided free flu shots right on the Beren and Wilf campuses to students who presented health insurance information. One student commented that the nurses were “so incredibly nice; assuring me that it would barely hurt — and it was true!” The student added that they even gave small chocolates at the event. Surveys distributed to the students who partook in the event provided insight into flu vaccination trends of some of the Yeshiva University student population.

Out of the 131 participating students (approximately half female and half male), 95 percent believed that it is important to get a flu vaccine, and 41 percent had been sick with the flu before. However, 26 percent said that they did not receive a flu vaccine last year, and 21 percent said that if free flu shots were not offered on campus, they would not have gotten vaccinated.

Students varied in regards to why they may have gone a year without getting a flu vaccine. Among those who reported missing a year of vaccination in the past, the largest percentage (31.5%) said that it was because “there was no convenient way to get a flu shot.” Others (11%) responded that they “didn’t feel the need.” Less than one percent avoided it, respectively, because of fear of side effects, discomfort surrounding needles, or belief that it does not work.

It seems that, at least in the population surveyed, the main obstacle towards students getting vaccinated is not wariness or fear. Rather, it is a lack of sufficient motivation, comfort, or convenience that drives lackluster flu vaccine participation. Of course, this survey population was limited to those who attended the 2019 flu shot clinic and therefore will not be representative of global student attitudes, whether at Yeshiva University alone or in the broader US college student population. Specifically, it would likely not represent the attitudes of students with pre-existing strong opposition to flu vaccinations.

Flu shot clinics such as the ones organized on the Yeshiva University campuses this fall represent a significant stride toward addressing the element of convenience, both in terms of monetary relief and logistical ease. In order to find out if objections to the vaccine itself exist within the overall YU population and to investigate the nature of these hesitations, a more widespread canvassing could be conducted. This would provide insight into whether the student body could benefit from an educational initiative to combat misconceptions about the flu vaccine. It also would give us an understanding of our health behaviors and attitudes, so we can implement appropriate changes that will move us forward in a positive direction.

Orthodox Jews and the Political Process

By Rabbi Yosef Blu

Orthodox rabbis play a prominent role in Israeli politics and often openly support candidates in American elections. Since I question the connection between halakha and political policy, I have refrained from expressing my political views to the students in Yeshiva. However, there is a difference in analyzing the basis used by many Orthodox Jews, including rabbis, in taking public political positions.

In September 2019, a prominent Rosh Yeshiva attended a rally where the attorney general and police commissioner, both Orthodox Jews appointed by the Prime Minister, were denounced. All the religious parties support legislation that would immunize the Prime Minister from any prosecution. If one reads Orthodox media in America, one gets the impression that Orthodox Jewry is totally supportive of the President. His demeaning, name-calling of opponents doesn’t even require being defended.

Support for both leaders can be justified in terms of protecting the community’s self-interest, though that would not necessarily lead to such extreme demonstrations of loyalty and attacks on opponents. What appears to be lacking is any concern about illegal, unethical and immoral behavior. Whether reflecting a cynical attitude about politicians in general or accepting that these leaders demand total loyalty and cannot handle any criticism, the impression exists that Orthodoxy doesn’t care about ethics or legality.

Judaism doesn’t tolerate corruption. No political gains are worth losing ethical sensitivity.

Orthodox Jews have shown no such tolerance. The substance of the allegations is seen as irrelevant. The leaders have demanded loyalty from their followers.

In Israel, a prominent Rosh Yeshiva attended a rally where the attorney general and police commissioner, both Orthodox Jews appointed by the Prime Minister, were denounced. All the religious parties support legislation that would immunize the Prime Minister from any prosecution. If one reads Orthodox media in America, one gets the impression that Orthodox Jewry is totally supportive of the President. His demeaning, name-calling of opponents doesn’t even require being defended.

Support for both leaders can be justified in terms of protecting the community’s self-interest, though that would not necessarily lead to such extreme demonstrations of loyalty and attacks on opponents. What appears to be lacking is any concern about illegal, unethical and immoral behavior. Whether reflecting a cynical attitude about politicians in general or accepting that these leaders demand total loyalty and cannot handle any criticism, the impression exists that Orthodoxy doesn’t care about ethics or legality.

What has differentiated Orthodox Jews from other Jewish streams is a full commitment to halakhic observance, which is most clearly reflected in ritual observance from Rite Aid. However, these hesitations are obvious. What is more, among the non-Jews for the first time in two thousand years, ethical standards are rarely mentioned. This is a major mistake pragmatically in promoting Orthodoxy to the broader Jewish and non-Jewish communities, and more importantly as not being true to our basic values. Traditionally one of the highest Jewish compliments was that one is a “yshkor,” a person who is straight and has unquestioned integrity. It is paradoxical that anti-Semites characterized Jews as cheats and manipulators.

Maimonides, in concluding his Guide to the Perplexed, quotes and amplifies Jesus’ words: “Let him who glories glory in this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord Who exercise faithful love, justice and righteousness in this earth: for in these things that I delight says Hashem.” For Maimonides, the goal of knowledge is to see ourselves into emulating Him by pursuing faithful love, justice and righteousness.

Judaism doesn’t tolerate corruption. No political gains are worth losing ethical sensitivity. Without integrity our religious identity is hollow. Silence may seem to be a clever strategy but demonstrating ethical concerns is being authentically Jewish.
By Nathan Hakakian

On Monday, Dec. 16, Boeing announced that they would suspend the production of the 737 MAX jet beginning in January. Many questions regarding the safety of the plane have arisen since two devastating crashes took the lives of 346 passengers. Although the 737 MAX was once viewed as the gold standard in commercial aviation, these two events prompted experts to question the overall safety of the plane—ultimately ordering their immediate grounding. Boeing has been the industry leader in the transportation industry for decades, but its failure to produce an updated 737 MAX could compromise both their reputation as well as their profitability.

Founded in 1916 in Seattle, Boeing began as strictly an aircraft manufacturer. But they soon began to expand their reach into a number of industries through acquisitions. In 1996 they bought Vertol Aircraft Corporation, which was the largest helicopter producer at the time. Boeing saw this purchase as their ticket to diversify their interests, entering industries such as marine craft, energy production and transit systems. In 1995 the company led a conglomerate of European companies to form Sea Launch, an avenue to enter the satellite and space travel fields. The continued interest in satellites provided the framework for Boeing’s 2000 acquisition of Hughes Electronics satellite division, which is known today as DIRECTV. In 2017, Boeing was the fifth-largest defense contractor. Boeing soon established itself as a main player in a variety of industries.

Despite having a presence in numerous industries, Boeing’s main focus will continue to be in commercial aviation. They have worked closely with towns, in which a large number of aviation accounts from airlines worldwide, and have worked equally as hard to retain those relationships. But in 2011, American Airlines pre- sented Boeing with an ultimatum: they would have been ready by 2017. Boeing felt that they had to cut costs and time. They tried their hardest to retain the design of the older planes, and according to a New York Times Article, engineers were pushed to submit sketches of the plane at double the normal pace. Although Boeing executives were confident that the redesigned 737 MAX planes had passed the required internal safety regulations, “the company was trying to avoid costs and trying to contain the level of change. They wanted the minimum change to simplify the training differences, minimum change to reduce costs, and to get it done quickly,” according to veteran Boeing engineer Rick Wunder. One of the results of neglecting to ensure proper safety protocols was the failure of their MCAS software. The MCAS system was created to counterbalance the plane’s tendency to move its nose up. But instead of creating balance, the MCAS system malfunctioned and the pilots were unable to override the system, causing the plane to crash in both incidents.

While the two crashes caused the grounding of the 737 MAX in March, Boeing had yet to halt production. They were still producing an average of 40 planes a month in their Seattle facility with the hope of receiving the green light from regulators. But, in early December, FAA administrator Stephen Dickson rejected the possibility of renewing the 737 MAX operating status before the end of the year. This announcement caused Boeing’s stock price to fall 4% within hours.

The financial impact on Boeing has been significant and will continue to worsen. The 200 already produced planes must all be individually inspected by the FAA— further delaying their delivery and causing Boeing’s cash shortage to worsen. Additionally, the company has been further leveraged to prepare to pay high production and compensation fees, allotting $3.6 and billion $6.1 billion respectively in anticipation—amounts that may need to be more than doubled in the coming months. As a result of the 737 MAX setback, Luke Tilley, the Chief Economist of Wilmington Trust predicts that the lack of production of the 737 MAX would reduce the quarterly annual GDP growth rate.

When looking at Boeing’s future, there is still reason for optimism. Despite the large looming uncertainty, Boeing announced that it did not plan to lay off any of its 150,000+ employees. Because of Boeing’s importance to the American economy, the government will likely assist them to return to stability, whether it be to narrow that lead.

Surprisingly, Pinterest is the fastest growing website by overall member growth, surpassing Facebook and competing with Tumblr along the way.

With all that veggie burger eaten, our health-conscious consumer is obviously going to want to burn off those calories. In comes Peloton (PTON). With their technologically enhanced stationary bikes and treadmills, they were lifted to a $2.2 billion valuation of $8.1 Billion. Peloton is following the ever-growing trend of subscription-based services and provides fitness classes through those endeavors.

In a completely different sector, social media was represented by the offering of the internet company Pinterest (PINS). Surprisingly, Pinterest is the fastest growing website by overall member growth, surpassing Facebook and competing with Tumblr along the way. Its stock has remained slightly volatile—record highs and lows in the process, and is currently trading just below its initial price of $19. Underneath the same tech umbrella was a lesser-known, but an equally as important company called Zoom (ZM). One of the few profitable companies that IPO’d in 2019, the cloud-based videoconferencing company still did not garner the tremendous attention from the media and investors that other, more “famous” companies did. To add insult to the ignorant investors, Zoom has been trading exponentially higher than its offering price and looks to continue its growth with the rise of its product usage across all industries.

Closing it out is Smile Direct Club, with its direct-to-consumer business model which utilized licensed orthodontists to act as “brokers” in its battle with Invisalign in the clear aligner wars. While there are extremely promising growth expectations for this ever-expanding industry, new regulatory concerns have not decreased investor highness about rising expenses. This has caused its stock price to fall over 50% from its initial price of $23.

All in all, 2019 was a year in which a plethora of over-valued, loss-generating companies went public. Over time, thankfully, investors have corrected their mistakes and have calculated correct valuations.
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