

The COMMENTATOR

YEAR 75

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SAAC Success

Professor Evaluations to be Available Online in Fall 2011

By GABRIEL WEINBERG

At the close of previous semesters, students completed evaluations for every secular studies course, and the Dean's office compiled the data about each professor and his or her courses. After students received their grades, professors were able to read through the evaluations. After that, the only time the information in evaluations would again be perused was, briefly, during a faculty member's tenure evaluation process. Students remained in the dark, never given access to the evaluation results they generated.

This is all about to change. After extensive research and many meetings, the Student Academic Affairs Committee (SAAC), alongside Professors Gillian Steinberg, Ariel Malka, Shalom Holtz and Paula Geyh, developed a new set of course evaluations that will be handed out at the end of this semester. The results of

those evaluations will be linked to the SAAC website (YUSAAC.com) and accessible to Yeshiva students with a Banner User ID and password.

Before this development, the common methods of discerning a professor's pedagogic proficiency—either the *mesorah* of a family member or friend, or RateMyProfessors.com—had serious flaws. Information passed down for generations might be helpful, but many students lack a strong bond to elder YU students, and many current professors are recent arrivals. Additionally, RateMyProfessors contains only a small sampling of information about professors in Yeshiva with, in many cases, no feedback more detailed than a “chili pepper.”

Instituting this development was no simple task. Professors want

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Team Mofongo's Middle Eastern tang was good enough to out-delicious 15 other teams for the cholent title.

We Are What We Eat

Cholent and the Cook-Off of 2011

By MICAH STEIN

Russet potatoes sweet potatoes pinto beans kidney beans Bush's baked beans chick peas pearl barley hardboiled eggs onions carrots mustard seed smoky-hickory-sweet-tangy-honey-barbeque-sauce tomato juice Heinz ketchup Frank's Hot Sauce onion soup beef soup chicken soup Lawry's seasoned salt Kosher salt fresh ground black pepper cumin Montreal steak spice rutabaga leeks chili powder fresh garlic garlic powder slice-of-lemon coca-cola half-fat full-fat beef pastrami spare ribs falling-off-the-bone-flanken hot dog kishka-in-the-foil and kobe-wagyu beef – pounds of it – slow cooking in sixteen bubbling crock pots, emitting an intoxicating haze of spice and oil and flavor and zest. Simply dump-it-in—mix-it-up—turn-it-on—sit-and-wait—there-you-have-it—piping-hot...cholent.

It doesn't sound particularly ap-

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Pre-Law Terrain Changes in the Wake of Rani Lustiger's Departure

By EITAN NOVOGRODSKY

Pre-law students in Yeshiva College were caught off guard this January when they suddenly discovered that Ms. Rani Lustiger, the pre-law advisor on Wilf Campus, would not return for the Spring semester. The reason for Ms. Lustiger's departure remains unknown. Additionally, pre-law students were not immediately contacted by the Office of Academic Advisement to inform them of the change. These two factors have cast a sense of mystery over the changes currently taking place in the pre-professional advising office.

Advising has been struggling to

deal with the ramifications of Ms. Lustiger's absence. The volume of pre-law students in the university demands an advisement office capable of providing students with events, connections to law schools, and assistance throughout the journey of LSATs and applications. General advisement for students still unsure about a career in law must also be provided.

These assorted roles of Ms. Lustiger have fallen primarily into the hands of the existing advising staff on the Wilf and Beren campuses. Professor Allison Smith, the Director of Advising on Wilf Campus,

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Student Leaders, Faculty, and Administrators Discuss Relevance of Torah Umadda to Our Generation

By COMMENTATOR STAFF

On Wednesday, April 6, the newly formed Torah Umadda Club held its first blockbuster event of the year: a panel of faculty, administrators, and student leaders to discuss the implications, meanings, and challenges of living a life of Torah Umadda.

“Time and again I have heard people conjecture about the term Torah Umadda, often coming to different conclusions regarding its nature,” said Jina Davidovich, who organized the event, along with Miriam Apter and Zahava Singer of the Torah Umadda board and the various members of the TAC board. “I wanted to provide a range of different speakers, each involved in varying aspects of the Jewish community, to address concerns many students have raised about Torah Umadda's relationship to Yeshiva

University, and to the Modern Orthodox community as a whole.”

The event was divided into three panels that answered questions posed by Davidovich, the moderator, and then turned to the audience for further questions.

The first panel, of Rabbis Saul Berman (Associate Professor of Jewish Studies), Yosef Blau (Mashgiach Ruchani), and Yona Reiss (Dean of RIETS), and Drs. Daniel Rynhold (Associate Professor of Modern Jewish Philosophy at Revel), and Shira Weiss (Instructor in Jewish Philosophy), focused on the ideology of Torah Umadda itself and how it fits into the modern world. Davidovich first asked panelists to define the very nature of the concept according to their understandings.

“Torah is a musical instrument,” said Rabbi Berman. “If you know

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Staff

Editorials

Stop Complaining About the 'Off-Campus Fee'

We've heard all the arguments already: students and parents vociferously rail against tuition or activity fee increases, while the university's administration responds that to maintain the level of education and experience Yeshiva is providing, more of the fiscal burden must be shouldered by the consumers of the product. Both sides have valid points, and both sides are entirely right from their own points of view. But both could also do with a little humbling of their positions and an appreciation for a broader outlook.

For the administration of Yeshiva: it is understandable – but tragic – that in these difficult economic times, the university is, like most businesses, struggling. Reality constantly reminds us that, no matter how noble the endeavor, idealism does not pay the bills. Nevertheless, Yeshiva's trouble meeting the budget does not entitle those in possession of information to deprive others of it. Amidst announcements for reimagining education there has yet to be any word on the planned costs for next year's students, nor even an indication of how said reimagining is to affect the budget as a whole. Transparency as an achievement has long eluded this administration, a trend which seems to be getting worse instead of better.

To the students: tuition is high at Yeshiva, but this is hardly the exception; the cost of higher education across

the U.S. has been increasing for the last fifty years. It's worth remembering though that the high price of Yeshiva education is not going towards lining the pockets of university administrators, regardless of popular perceptions. The increasing tuition has accompanied an aggressive expansion of Yeshiva University's undergraduate offerings, both academic and extracurricular, that make many aspects of YU almost unrecognizable from the university of eight years ago. Look around and see how many qualified professors teach classes with only half a dozen students, how many campus events a week feature interesting speakers and refreshment spreads, how many extra-curricular clubs regularly receive funding to run a variety of programs, how many free tutoring services are offered for nearly every subject taught. All of these seem to be out of proportion with the size of Yeshiva in a very good way; for a relatively small institution, YU offers an awful lot of opportunities to its students. So the next time you think of complaining about the prohibitive costs of attendance, think twice and recall where the funding comes from for your Roshei Yeshiva and Arts Festivals and radio shows and CDC and Counseling Center. And if you don't avail yourself of these resources, you should start – you're paying for them anyway.

More Majors Benefit Everyone

Yeshiva doesn't offer enough majors. The problem would prove more challenging, and more fundamental, if Yeshiva did not offer enough courses to provide those additional majors. But that's not the case: in our small university, most of the departments do a stellar job of offering a broad array of courses, with more than enough courses, even in specific sub-fields, to afford many major options to students. So where are they?

The University is strangely hesitant to put in writing what it has the resources – and power – to do. Course titles and leading academics necessary for offering advanced or specialized majors are on hand, and more importantly, so are the students who want to take advantage. What seems to hold back the powers that be is a fear of officially declaring this, a lack of confidence in either the framework in place or their own power to dictate the designations for that framework.

Obviously, what matters most is whether students receive the quality education they seek, regardless of what it's called on their transcripts. But after three to four years of tirelessly pursuing their interests and goals, students deserve to get credit. Offering more majors also helps students determine and shape their courses of study early on: an area of interest for students will, instead of falling by the wayside, be encouraged as an official program of progress. And, in addition to offering this clarity to these students about what suits them best, more majors – and more specific ones – make students

more marketable for their post-college plans.

The Departments of Psychology and Biology, for example, make for a first-rate interdisciplinary tag team. The interface of the two subjects is a burgeoning field, and one of the most popular science majors across the country. Scientifically, the two disciplines inform each other on a fundamental level. Keeping the two separate constitutes an unfortunate injustice, stunting the potentially broader intellectual growth of students pursuing either field. As another example, Middle East studies, a major that would surely prove popular at Yeshiva, finds all of its constituent courses already contained in our catalog, between the departments of History, Political Science, and Language, Literatures, and Cultures. Yet, it is nearly impossible for students to pursue such a course of study, as taking so many courses in different departments would hamper their completion of the requisite number of courses for any one extant major.

A few simple, legislative changes would open up so many doors. With numerous experts on staff, Yeshiva department heads and professors could meet to determine the requirements for various interdisciplinary majors and major concentrations. The capability to pursue more precisely what we want to learn would make countless students more interesting and more interested, and better able to take advantage of Yeshiva University's incredible learning experience.

The COMMENTATOR

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7 Up

- 1. **Door-close buttons on elevators.** Presto! You hereby slam shut a large metallic wall, barring awkward acquaintances of yours from joining what is now a lively, productive ride with just your three best friends.
- 2. **Benny Smith’s (SSSB ’12) news interview about broken subway elevators.** One of the few good things to come from elevator malfunctions. “One time I was going back late at night, and my friends were like, don’t take the elevator, because you’ll probably get stuck.”
- 3. **The people who push the buttons on subway elevators.** Cheery, helpful, and chilled out. Thanks!
- 4. **A hypothetical YU in which attendants push elevator buttons for you.** Makes you feel like you’re living in a teenage dream.
- 5. **When you take an elevator to an obscure floor of Belfer that it takes a long time to get to, and then when you return, however much time later, to the elevator, it’s right there waiting for you. This is what people mean when they say “shana tovah.”**
- 6. **Serendipitously ending up in an elevator with your twelve best friends.** Best. Elevator ride. Ever.
- 7. **When you’re ascending from G, B, or whatever damp architectural accident exists below L in the building you’ve wandered in to, and the elevator doesn’t stop at the lobby.** I’ve always wondered what it’s like to be on time to something!



7 Down

- 1. **Door-close buttons that don’t work.** You got me all excited—I’m in control, I thought fleetingly—only to frustrate me deeply and slow down my day.
- 2. **Speaking of elevator-related malfunctions, the shutting down of the third Belfer elevator.** With people actually going to floors like “14” and what-the-heck-is-on “C,” rush-hour traffic was already unbearable, making me late to my “Sy Syms School of Business” classes.
- 3. **Flesh-hungry Glueck elevators.** If and when you make it past their steely, vicious jaws, you’ll still have to hit “5” a good eight times before they get the message.
- 4. **Elevator buttons that don’t light up or present any indication of their having been pressed.** I will press you again and again and again, to the bloody detriment of my index finger, fist, elbow, and hip. It’s worth it for that unexpected door-opening!
- 5. **When you’re walking and talking with a professor after class, and you go for the elevator, even though stairs are the logical choice from your low floor, to avoid prolonging your already-awkward dialogue, and then your professor goes for the elevator too, and the two of you share a three-minute wait outside the elevator, followed by a one-and-a-half-minute trip down.** Yep. It happens.
- 6. **The fact that the Mendel Gottesman Library elevators beep faster than they elevate.** Four beeps? I’m totally on the fourth floor already—cannot wait for my monastic study session! WHAT?! What the heck is 2A?
- 7. **When you’re stuck in an elevator and the devil mysteriously possesses one or more of your co-passengers.** Straight-up horrifying.



Student Pulse:

Purim, Housing Changes, and the Wall of Lies

250 students took this issue’s Student Pulse

Purim

What kind of Purim Chagiga and or Seuda did you attend? (Select all that apply)

YU-	56.4%
Non-YU Mixed-	39.4%
Non-YU Separate Sex-	15.7%
None-	11.9%

“I was at YU’s Chagiga because I wanted to see the shpiel. And as for the Seuda, well, it was at home.”
“I went to the STERN chagiga because it’s awesome. Kind of a shame every event is separated these days though.”

Did you imbibe alcohol on Purim night?

No-	76.1%
Yes, enough to fulfill my obligation	10.5%
Yes, I drank more than enough for my obligation but not enough to get drunk	5.5%
Yes, I got drunk-	8.0%

Did you imbibe alcohol on Purim day?

No-	42.2%
Yes, enough to fulfill my obligation-	33.3%
Yes, I drank more than enough for my obligation but not enough to get drunk	8.9%
Yes, I got drunk-	15.6%

“I got drunk as a means of fulfilling my obligation.”

Did you dress up on Purim?

Yes-	60.3%
No-	39.7%

As?
“Mummar Gaddafi” • “Pirate” • “Half yeshivish-half normal” • “An Atom” • “A Sailor” • “The Four Seasons, with three friends” • “Holly Golightly” • “A Rainbow” • “Snooki”

Housing

Do you think the housing changes are a good idea or not?

Great Idea-	7.7%
Good Idea-	23.6%
Unsure-	49.5%
Bad Idea-	11.5%
Terrible Idea-	7.7%

“I like the structure of a Freshman Dorm. It will help develop a sense of FTOC community.”
“Won’t that make the separate economic classes in the student body stand out?”
“About time YU got some good living areas.”

Do you agree that all students should have to pay an extra \$500 for current university services?

Strongly Agree-	2.9%
Agree-	14.8%
Neutral-	25.4%
Disagree-	23.4%
Strongly Disagree-	33.5%

“I would like to see all these little fees included in tuition, so I know exactly how much YU costs each year. On that note, I would like to see a breakdown of where my tuition money is going.”
“We pay enough as it is.”
“On campus students are in essence subsidizing the amenities for everyone at YU. Those people who live off campus should pay a fee for their fair share of the costs.”
“It’s a way of raising the cost of attending YU for everyone, despite repeated ‘freezes’ on the tuition.”
“I don’t have enough information to answer this question.”

Wall of Lies

Did you see the Wall of Lies posted in Furst Hall during Israel Apartheid Week?

Yes-	45.9%
No-	28.0%
No, but I heard about it while it was up-	15.0%
No, but I heard about it afterwards-	11.1%

Were you aware that the Wall of Lies was in response to Israel Apartheid Week?

Yes-	46.1%
No-	35.0%
Did not know about it until someone told me-	9.2%
Did not know about it until I read it in <i>The Commentator</i> -	7.8%

Do you agree that displaying the wall was a proper

response to Israel Apartheid week?

Strongly agree-	12.0%
Agree-	22.9%
Neutral-	35.4%
Disagree-	17.7%
Strongly disagree-	12.0%

“It was offensive to almost everyone I spoke to.”
“It was not clear to most people that it was in response to Israel Apartheid Week, and I don’t think it was in any way a positive response to the Apartheid Week. In fact, I think the entire Wall of Lies was just as destructive as the Apartheid Week itself.”
“I think the idea was good, but the execution was not. The wall should have been objectively accurate, without ambiguous statements, and the use of blood font was probably ill-advised, based on the reaction it elicited.”
“Tolerance is a two way street.”
“While I do agree with generating discussion I also believe it should have been framed as such – some sort of accompanying piece saying how the Israel Club wants to generate activism and discussion rather than just displaying it as is would have been a good idea.”

Do you think that displaying it in Furst Hall was an appropriate use of the space, and a constructive presentation of the idea?

Yes-	47.6%
No-	52.4%

“It wasn’t publicized well enough. I only heard about it because I’m taking some classes about Middle East politics and some students mentioned it.”
“We have to remain calm, composed, and civil. We cannot resort to vicious biting tactics which our political and religious rivals tend to use.”
“I have confidence that YU students are capable of having more complex intellectual dialogue than the one sided Wall of Lies. Why did we stoop down to their level? The Israel club could have brought a much more powerful message.”
“Kol Hakavod to the Israel Club and Yakum for shaking up the student body!”

Is Yeshiva University doing enough to combat anti-Zionism and/or Anti-Semitism?

Yes-	14.0%
No-	28.0%

I have no idea what YU is doing to combat these issues-

58.0%

What else can YU do?
“We should ask Columbia Hillel what YU students can do to help their cause there. By going to school in an environment that has both sides, they are far more qualified to develop a constructive response to IAW than we are, and offering our help to them would be the best thing we could do.”
“Invite them to have a debate.”
“We should house speakers and institute programming to help educate the masses about the facts surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict so that we can help combat ignorance.”
“Go to those campuses and support the pro-Israel groups.”
“Could the CJF team up with the David Project? Running smaller seminars on campuses could greatly help.”

Interesting Statistics
Are all YU Chagigot created equal? 65.8% of Yeshiva College students polled attended the men’s Purim Chagiga, while only 48% of Stern students polled attended the women’s Purim Chagiga.

Who likes costumes? While 53.6% of Yeshiva College men dressed up on Purim, 69.4% of Stern Women dressed up.

While 71% of off campus dwellers dressed up on Purim, only 53.9% of their dorm or IHP residing friends did.

While 62.2% of non-honors students think that displaying the Wall of Lies in Furst Hall was an appropriate use of the space and a constructive presentation of the idea, 72.9% of Honors students believe it was not.

Panel Addresses Modern Conception of Torah Umadda

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how to play it, it produces beautiful sounds – but if not, it just makes noise. Madda improves our knowledge of Hashem and helps us learn to use the Torah.”

“Torah Umadda discourages a fear of knowledge,” said Rabbi Reiss. “It provides an imperative to explore the world as a realization of religious freedom. It’s the understanding that discovering and exploring will make you a stronger *oved Hashem*, as long as it is done through the prism of *yirat shamayim*.”

Dr. Weiss described the evolution of her view of Torah Umadda and explained how she advanced from a compartmentalized understanding of the term, in which each side was valuable but independent, to a holistic view, in which each side improved the other.

“We need to start with the assumption that this world is a valuable place,” said Rabbi Blau, “and that *Hashem* put us here to explore it and improve it.” He continued about the importance of discovery: “Our goal is to strive for truth in every way, no matter what the source of that truth is,” he said. “There is truth of the world in science and math, and truth of the human being in literature.”

Dr. Rynhold concluded the answers by explaining his own difficulty in defining the term: “Augustine once asked, ‘What is time? If no one asks me then I know well enough what it is, but as soon as someone asks me to define it I’m baffled,’” he said. “Torah Umadda is the same thing – I know what it is, but I can’t define it. It’s simply how I live my life.”

The panelists were next asked if Madda has been viewed as a religious pursuit, either in Jewish History or in their personal thought. Dr. Weiss explained that she incorporated various aspects of secular education, particularly the humanities, into her own religious personality.

Rabbi Blau agreed with Dr. Weiss, affirming the importance of Madda to developing a religious personality, although he added that the importance of a study like Jewish history still does not qualify it for *birchot hatorah* [blessings on learning Torah].

Rabbi Reiss quoted the Meiri, who compared the seven branches of the menorah in the Temple to the seven branches of wisdom that exist in the world. “The central branch must always be Torah,” he said, “and, just as in the *beis hamikdash*, the others must lean in towards it.” The centrality of Torah, he concluded, “enables us to fully grasp and appreciate Madda. Without Torah, you will miss the spiritual fulfillment that is possible in every avenue of knowledge.”

Rabbi Berman quoted Rav Saadia Gaon, who differentiated between the concepts of truth-of-

revelation (Torah) and truth-of-reason (Madda). “If there is ever a contradiction between the two,” said Rabbi Berman quoting Rav Saadia, “Then you must follow Torah, but understand that there was an error in your calculations, for there is only one truth that both revelation and reason must adhere to.”

Dr. Rynhold concluded the question by pointing out that sometimes pursuit of areas other than Torah were necessary simply for people’s own mental well-being. “Sometimes at the end of a day I’ll sit down and enjoy a game of football,” he said. “Torah is the guiding framework of my life, but not every bit of what I do directly relates to it.”

These panelists were also asked about increased women’s roles in the Jewish community, the study of secular Jewish scholarship and Biblical Criticism, and the concept of Da’at Torah.

The second section of the event, which featured President of Yeshiva University Richard Joel and Dean of Stern College for Women Karen Bacon, specifically explored Torah Umadda as it relates to Yeshiva University. “What exactly do we mean when we say Yeshiva University is based on Torah Umadda?” asked Davidovich.

“It’s the very way that we live,” said President Joel. “It’s the sacred partnership we promote between *klei kodesh* and *lay kodesh*.”

“Some of our classes are Torah, and some are Madda,” said Dean Bacon. “But all have respect for both.”

The panelists also answered whether they would encourage a prospective student only interested in one of the two to attend Yeshiva University. “People change,” said Dean Bacon. “Growth in interest is a mark of growing maturity. No one should ever hope to stay static.” “We’re not an exclusive club,” agreed President Joel. “We all grow, and we try to look at what students can do and where they can go. If someone is open to growth, we have enough confidence in what we offer to think it’s worth it.”

“But,” he added, “if someone doesn’t have the slightest interest in one or the other, then this might not be the place for them.”

Davidovich concluded the section by asking the panelists what they thought the greatest struggle facing Modern Orthodoxy today was. “We’ve fallen into the trap of valuing money over values,” said Dean Bacon. “Too many of our people are short-sighted with their money instead of investing in Torah and Torah education.”

“Once people stop knowing our story, it’s over,” said President Joel. “We need more students to become a part of our community.”

“Cynicism,” he added, “is rampant and terrible today. We sink into it too easily, complaining instead of acting.”

President Joel concluded with a

note on the scope of Modern Orthodoxy’s ambitions: “We can’t pretend that the rest of *Am Yisrael* isn’t our responsibility,” he said, “but we also can’t believe our responsibility is to make them like us.”

The final section of the event consisted of a panel of student leaders, including Shlomo Zuckier (Editor, *Kol Hamevaser*), Channah Yudkowsky (Treasurer, TAC ‘09-’10), Sarit Bendavid (Editor, *Kol Hamevaser*), Simeon Botwinick (Editor, *The Commentator*), Shosh Balk (President, TAC), Simon Goldberg (President, SHEM), and

to be involved in religious life and are looking for meaning.” Although this enthusiasm is commendable, Zuckier explained the danger latent when someone discovers that Western and Jewish ideals, such as views on egalitarianism, don’t perfectly align. “When people see Orthodoxy incompatible with ideas they believe in,” he said, “they often turn to other paths. The challenge will be to formulate a response to egalitarianism that is halakhic but that will also resonate in contemporary society.”

Yudkowsky spoke about the particular importance of Torah Umadda

us see Torah in a new light.”

Botwinick described the role of Torah Umadda as a guiding mission statement for *The Commentator* that defined the scope of the paper’s reach. “We write, not just about campus events, but about issues that relate to the Torah Umadda community,” he said, “which is why, for example, earlier this year we decided to cover the Statement of Principles on the Role of Homosexuals in the Orthodox Community.”

Botwinick also presented Torah Umadda as a greater justification, and even imperative, for the production and consumption of newspapers. “Torah Umadda is a belief that God created the entire world,” he said. “Just as God crafts and cares about the world of Torah, He also crafts and cares about the world of human events. Studying and learning more about this world means immersing ourselves in His work.”

Balk applauded the unique opportunities for the synthesis of Torah Umadda that YU provides – “in no other place would Rashi be quoted in a science class,” she said – but then described the difficult balance she has faced between promoting the values of Torah Umadda through events and letting students decide on their own what events to run. “Is my mission to turn out students like me?” she wondered. “There’s a very broad range of students and activities they want to bring to this university.”

Goldberg explained that he identified most with Torah Umadda as a lifestyle rooted in Torah, but directed with the ideal of *tikkun olam*. “If we are to be Majestic Men,” he said, quoting an idealized version of humanity presented by Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, “that necessitates that we attend to the plight of others. When we help others, we not only do other people a service, but help ourselves as well.”

Himber concluded the student leader section by imploring students to realize that they, thorough their actions, would ultimately decide what defined Torah Umadda. “Instead of looking to our university to present what Torah Umadda means,” she said, “maybe we should be shifting the focus to our own actions and decisions. Ultimately, it’s our choices that determine what Torah Umadda means, and not the university’s policies.”

The event, although attended by only about eighty students, has received positive reviews, with many especially commending the final section.

“I found the student leader segment to be the most inspirational part of the event,” said Davidovich afterwards. “Hearing my peers share their hopes and concerns regarding the community in which we take so much pride made me feel secure in knowing that the future of this community is in the hands of people who care.”



Dr. Shira Weiss, Dean Karen Bacon, Rabbi Yosef Blau, and Dr. Daniel Rynhold (Clockwise from top left) each shared their thoughts on the meaning of Yeshiva University’s motto.

Alana Himber (President, SCWSC). Davidovich asked these students how they personally related to Torah Umadda, whether they thought YU had provided a thorough lens of Torah Umadda for them, and what challenges they saw to Modern Orthodoxy as a whole.

Zuckier opened the section by describing how Torah Umadda leads to a greater understanding and appreciation of others. “What Torah Umadda means is that study of ideas from other cultures is worthwhile, and maybe even crucial,” said Zuckier. “It promotes and encourages concern for people who are different from us.”

He finished by describing what he saw as a serious issue in the Modern Orthodox world. “Our greatest issue used to be apathy,” he said. “But today we face a different issue. We live in a generation where religion isn’t imposed. People want

for students. “Everyone who just spoke to us has been talking about this for the past decade,” she said, “but none of us have any idea what we’re talking about. Just like you, we’re thinking about what Torah Umadda means to our generation. Think about what you would answer if you were asked these questions.” She added that her wish was that “everything in my life could be Torah,” and described the joy of moments when bits of Torah came up in secular classes. “That’s when Madda becomes Torah,” she said, “and you see God’s hand in the world.”

Bendavid spoke next about the interplay between Torah and Madda. “Torah should be the center of our lives,” she said, “but Madda should become a part of our Torah, not secondary to it. The two should be in conversation with each other – Torah helps us understand the world, and understanding the world helps

SAAC Success

continued from front page

their courses “to be fairly and truthfully represented,” explains Professor Steinberg. The professors on the committee were impressed by the SAAC members, who are promoting a way for students to make better informed decisions on their class choices other than by asking a friend which professor gives the easiest “A.”

Professor Steinberg told *The Commentator* that these new questions were made with the educationally motivated student in mind. “The SAAC forms...ask questions student representatives feel will be the most useful to students planning their schedules.” This contrasts with the Dean’s evaluations which “help him determine whether faculty members deserve raises, reappointment, or promotion.”

Some questions on the new form include, “Does the professor respond to emails within 3 business days?” and “Does the information in the syllabus accurately reflect what happens in the course?” Students respond with the familiar multiple choice answers that reflect the two extremes.

This puts a new weight on students to provide thoughtful answers to twelve multiple-choice questions. “The more accurate your evaluation, the better the feel others will have about the professor,” comments SAAC Vice President Rafi Blumenthal (YC ’11), who led the SAAC subcommittee on this issue. For now, the evaluations only have multiple-choice questions. In the future, the SAAC looks to add short responses to invite more detailed student responses.

Raffi Holzer (YC ’12), SAAC President, believes that the SAAC is not finished advancing this service, and even more student-faculty cooperation is needed. “Course and professor evaluations are essential, but we can do more,” he said. “Hopefully we will succeed in getting professors to post their syllabi before registration so students can make better-informed course choices.”

New Pre-Law Terrain

continued from front page

Ms. Lolita Wood-Hill, the pre-health advisor, and Dr. John Fousek, the pre-law advisor on the Beren campus, have all been working overtime to temporarily fill the post previously filled by Ms. Lustiger.

Students in the midst of applications and seeking counsel about the pre-law track have been directed to both Smith and Wood-Hill, both of whom have experience in such a capacity. Ms. Wood-Hill was involved in pre-law advisement when she worked at Hunter College. Professor Smith has been helping students find summer internships, particularly through the Pre-Law Judicial Internship Program. She has been interviewing students and has been in contact with past employers of YU students.

Meanwhile, the number of current pre-law offerings has not decreased. Dr. Raji Viswanathan, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, points to the plethora of events and opportunities still being offered to pre-law students. The Jacob Hecht Pre-Law Society, run by Yeshiva University students, has taken a leading role in organizing and carrying out helpful events. A quick look at the society’s Facebook page indicates the continued, vibrant life of Yeshiva’s pre-law culture. Recent events included a workshop entitled “Jewish Women in the Legal Workplace” and a visit to the Manhattan DA’s office. The Langfan Family Constitutional Oratory Competition took place on 3 April 2011 with cash prizes awarded to participants.

According to Dean Viswanathan, the search for a replacement for Ms. Lustiger has been off to a rough start. Professor Smith and Dr. Fousek have taken the lead in seeking an effective replacement. They are committed to finding someone fit for the job and have made contact with many law schools and undergraduate programs to determine exactly how to achieve that goal. Pre-law students will be updated as more permanent changes are eventually made.

Messianism Through the Ages Academic Conference Examines Varied Roles of Messianic Thought Throughout Jewish History

BY RAFI BLUMENTHAL

On Sunday, April 4th, the Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program hosted an academic conference entitled “Messianism Through the Ages” in Furst Hall. The program was the product of an effort spearheaded by several students currently enrolled in the Honors Program with the intention of bringing together a variety of scholars to discuss the topic of how Messianism has been manifested and understood throughout a wide spectrum of Jewish history, from the Second Temple era up until its modern day applications.

Debra Kaplan, Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva College, was the faculty mentor for the program, helping the students to organize the conference. She noted that the conference was the product of months of hard work and effort by Honors students Jake Friedman, Chesky Kopel, Shaul Seidler-Feller and Shlomo Zuckier. “The student organizers produced a fantastic and thought-provoking event,” she said, “and I am really pleased to see how much their hard work paid off.”

The event began with a few introductory remarks from Professor Gabriel Cwilich, who discussed the overall function and purpose of the Honors Program, and praised the Program’s efforts to further advance the overall academic environment in Yeshiva. He also gave thanks to President Joel for his continuous support, and then called upon him to offer some introductory remarks.

President Joel then discussed a certain rare book stored in a library in Illinois and noted that its value stems not from the book itself but from the notes in the margin that Mark Twain had penned. Extending that analogy, he suggested that our role here as students is analogous to the notes in the margin, and that our responsibility and importance stems from our ability to insert our own notes into the margins of the great works that we study and tradition that we are a part of. He then expressed a hope that one day our

own work would become the platform for the margin-notes of future students. With that, he stepped down and the academic portion of the conference officially began.

Professor David Berger, Dean of the Bernard Revel Graduate School, was the first speaker. In his lecture entitled “Prophecy, Doctrine, Calculation, and Action: The Theory and Practice of Jewish Messianism from Antiquity to the Present,” he gave a broad overview of Jewish Messianism throughout the wide spectrum of Jewish History, tracing it from Bar Kokhba, the first Jewish messianic figure (with the possible exception of Jesus), and followed various messianic figures and ideas throughout history, ending with a particularly fascinating consideration of the messianic ideas inherent

Jewish Thought.” The session began with a discussion by Brandeis’ Reuven Kimmelman on the “Redemptive Non-Messianic Liturgy” of the *Amidah*. This was followed by an exploration by Professor Elliot R. Wolfson from New York University about messianic temporality in the writings and thinking of Menachem Mendel Schneerson and Emanuel Levinas, wherein he memorably noted the surprising similarities between these two ostensibly opposite thinkers and comically mused that “messianic expectations can lead to strange bed-fellows.” Benjamin Ish-Shalom closed out the session by giving a lecture on the various models of messianic idea in modern Jewish thought.

Throughout the conference, a recurring theme was the many ways



within both religious Zionism and Lubavitch Hasidism, including their continuities and breaks from past traditions and models.

Following a brief coffee break, the first panel, chaired by YC’s Professor of Jewish History Joseph Angel and entitled “Messianic Moments in Jewish History,” featured Professor and Vice Provost Lawrence Schiffman, Professor Daniel Lasker from the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, and Professor Ronnie Perelis, Professor of Jewish History in both Revel and YC. Schiffman discussed messianism during the era of Second Temple Judaism, followed by Lasker, who outlined its manifestations throughout Medieval Jewish-Christian debates. Perelis closed the session with an exploration of both Jewish and Christian attempts to interpret New World discoveries through a messianic lens.

After another coffee-break, YC’s Professor of Jewish Philosophy Jonathan Dauber led the second session, entitled “Messianic Expectation in

that Jews, living in different places and times, strove to adapt messianism to their own specific context and to interpret it according to the events being witnessed within the world around them.

In that vein, then, YU’s conference on the topic can be seen as our own attempt to integrate messianism into our own modern – and oftentimes overwhelmingly rationalist – *gestalt*. And perhaps, in addition to the different analyses of history that the different scholars engaged in, we too, as students and participants in the conference, are engaging in the next stage of messianic activity, one where we study it on our terms, within the comfortable walls of our own university and the unique nexus that it occupies. By doing so, we may be effectively constituting the next step of the long history of “Jews and Messianism throughout the Ages,” and defining our roles within it, just our ancestors have done for centuries before us.

**THERE'S MORE GOING ON AT YU
THAN YOU THINK . . .**

FOOTNOTES

the official blog of
The Commentator
www.yufootnotes.com

Keep up with Yeshiva University
news, events, and happenings.
Updated daily, to let you know
what's going on beneath the surface of YU.

War and Ethics Course Sends YU Students to Israel

By EITAN ULMER

This past year, Yeshiva University hosted a new course called “War and Ethics,” which allowed students from both YC and Stern to study the different *halakhic* and philosophical perspectives on war and to go to Jerusalem over winter break. They visited Jerusalem’s Center for Ethics, where they continued their discussions.

The course, taught by Dr. Adrienne Asch and Rabbi Shalom Carmy, was originally suggested by Professor Daniel Statman, who is affiliated with the Center in Jerusalem and was a guest at the Center’s New York branch a few years ago. He came with the suggestion that students here would benefit from meeting with people in Israel, such as Israeli philosophers and policy makers, “to learn about how a country that used religious law and secular law together, and religious and secular ethics, tried to think about ethical issues,” as Dr. Asch put it.

The Center at YU thought it was a great idea, but added that the students would need to have studied the topic before traveling to Israel, in order to maximize their time and get the most out of the conversations they would have there.

Once the topic was decided on,

planning began, and that took about a year of discussion, starting in February of 2009. Initially the idea was to have the course take place in the fall of 2009, but the feeling became that too much was being planned last-minute. The next option was doing it in May or June, but the feeling was that having such a concentrated course would not be the most beneficial, and the course was thus set for the fall of 2010.

Classes met in New York for about 20 hours, with sessions being taught by both Dr. Asch and Rabbi Carmy together as well as with four guest lecturers. These sessions faced many challenges. One was the combination of two very different professors, “one a biblical and *halakhic* expert, and one more versed in non-religiously oriented ethics.” The professors took turns alternating between Beren and Wilf Campus once a week, while the students from the alternate campuses would look in through video chats. Although much effort was expended to make sure the technological aspects worked smoothly, there were still occasional problems, as well as the inhibition on student involvement, as not all students could see and hear and it made conversation a little less free-flowing.

Everyone seemed to agree that

the Israel component was excellent. As Dr. Asch said, “Israel was a wonderful experience, because the speakers really welcomed them, gave very good lectures, very informative and passionate, but left a lot of time for questions and conversation and students had excellent questions.” While there, students had an opportunity to engage with speakers representing a broad range of viewpoints, both soldiers, pacifists, and people prominent in the army who also have *semikha*.

Most students in the course seemed to agree that while the overall idea of the course was fantastic, and that the Israel portion was fantastic, the logistical difficulties definitely hindered the New York segment. Jonathan Ziring (YC ‘11) summed it up, saying “The class in theory reflects what YU could and should be about. There is no other college where the students are familiar enough with the relevant Jewish con-

cepts that, as a large group, they can deal with some of the most complex philosophical issues from both secular and Torah perspectives. Despite some logistical issues, which definitely existed and I’m sure will be ironed out if the class is offered again, the seminar in Israel definitely reflected these goals. That being said, the class part of it was more difficult logistically, and we were

hindered in accomplishing those goals on this side of the Atlantic.”

Dr. Asch was also very pleased and grateful for the support and cooperation of the YC and Stern Deans’ offices, as well as the support of the Center for Israel Studies, and believes that everyone is looking forward to creating more courses like this in the future.



Professor Daniel Statman of the Jerusalem Center for Ethics continues the discussion after a lecture.

Auction for Action Raises \$3,000 for Gift of Life Foundation

By MICHAEL SILVERSTEIN

For nearly 20 years, the Gift of Life foundation has facilitated over 2,000 bone marrow and stem cell transplants, saving the lives of many people suffering from life-threatening illnesses such as leukemia and lymphoma. While these transplants can save lives, potential recipients can only accept marrow or stem cells from a genetic match, which can often be very difficult to find. Often, a match is more likely

found among members of one’s ethnic group. The Gift of Life is an organization that attempts to build up its database of donors by collecting cheek swabs from Jews across the globe. Sadly, because of financial burdens, the organization has been unable to process over 10,000 swab kits.

When Torah Activities Council (TAC) Secretary Jamie Schneider (SCW ‘12), as liaison to iGIVE, was asked to think of a chessed event, she decided that Gift of Life was

the perfect cause. She opted to run a silent auction. Soon after, Asher Lindenbaum (YC ‘13) joined as co-coordinator of the event, which was then branded the “Auction for Action.” The Gift of Life was thrilled to hear about the event and was completely supportive of the idea.

For the past month, Schneider and Lindenbaum, along with student volunteers, called upon anyone and everyone to donate to the Auction. Their goal was to obtain as many prizes as possible, at no cost,

so that all of the profits from the Auction could go directly to the Gift of Life. Amazingly, the community at large answered their call. By the end of the month, they had collected a wide assortment of exciting prizes, including lunch with President Joel, Mets tickets (box seats), an iPod Touch, and even a free lesson at the New York Trapeze School. (Multiple Stern women offered to auction off the right to take them out on a date.) During the week of the event, Schneider and Lindenbaum sold raffle tickets for the silent auction on their respective campuses.

On Thursday night, April 7, students gathered in Furst Hall for the Auction. Because the event was sponsored by TAC, the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY), YU Chessed, and the YU Medical Ethics Society, the Auction even provided dessert and drinks at no cost. After students were given time to buy tickets, the evening program began with opening remarks from Schneider. Then, YU undergraduate Avi Karesh told the crowd his “really incredible story,” as one student referred to it. Almost five years ago, Avi donated bone marrow through Gift of Life to someone (bone marrow donors and recipients are kept anonymous, although the bone marrow recipient is now living happily due to Avi’s contribution). When Avi himself was later diagnosed with leukemia and was in need of a transplant, he too found his match in the Gift of Life registry. The crowd was then



treated to a spectacular performance by The Y-Studs, after which Mr. Bill Begal, president of the Gift of Life Board of Trustees, made motivating remarks. After both an uplifting and entertaining evening, the winners of the auction were announced.

When asked about their objectives for the evening, Lindenbaum and Schneider explained that they were threefold. In addition to “raising as much money as possible” for the foundation, they also wanted “to promote awareness by hearing from... someone who has seen the process of bone marrow donation from both ends.” At the same time, however, they also sought “to create an energetic and upbeat atmosphere where students could come together in a fun way to help the cause.”

Looking back at the evening, Lindenbaum and Schneider said that the “success” and “wonderful atmosphere” at the Auction were “reflective of the strength of the incredible community in YU.” After a month of hard work, they raised roughly \$3,000 for the Gift of Life Foundation. Because all prizes, food, and festivities were donated, every dollar spent on tickets is going directly toward processing cheek-swab kits.



The auction raised money to help fund the processing of over ten thousand swab kits.

On Making Choices

A Response to *The Commentator's*

'The Case for a Flexible Morning Program'

BY JERRY KARP

I was pleased to read *The Commentator's* recent staff editorial, "The Case for a Flexible Morning Program." I agree that the Jewish Studies administration might well look into ways of making the morning program more flexible, and I hope that this editorial might be responsible for the creation of new, more flexible initiatives. But I took issue with two aspects of the editorial piece which may, in my opinion, reflect the real issues involved.

The penultimate sentence in the editorial highlights a problem in the generally accepted wisdom at YU. "What if the Judaic studies programs we are all mandatorily enrolled in, the very programs that make Yeshiva what it is and the reason many of us are here, allowed for types of learning other than four hours of preparation for an hour and a half lecture?" Besides for the exaggeration here (MYP mandates three hours of preparation for that hour and a half lecture), it seems to me that there are indeed other programs that do allow for other types of learning. The apparently lesser-known Mechinah, IBC and SBMP programs do indeed have other schedules, in which both the requisite time and format of learning are different from those of MYP. Admittedly, the editorial does implicitly reference these programs earlier, but many of the concerns raised by the article would be alleviated if a student were enrolled in one of these programs. For example, we would not need to "pretend that every single student actually puts in the hours that the morning programs decree" if the students we were examining were part of the Mechinah, IBC or SBMP programs, in which attendance is much more closely monitored. The entire premise of the editorial, that there is no flexibility whatsoever in morning programs, is thus false, considering that there are four programs from which students can choose.

Then why does the editorial (largely) ignore the existence of these programs? I think we all know the answer, even if we may not admit it aloud: it is because MYP is perceived to be a better, higher-level program than any of the others. While Mechinah is intended to introduce students to Jewish practice and learning, IBC and SBMP should, in theory, be just as intellectually rigorous as MYP – and yet the conventional wisdom denies that this is so. I have not been a student in IBC or SBMP, so I cannot state whether this assumption is actually true, but I do know that it is an as-

sumption which has been subtly transmitted to students by none other than the administration of the Jewish studies programs. Students in MYP are encouraged to learn with other students who may not come otherwise to the *beit midrash*, implying that those students, the ones in Mechinah, IBC and SBMP, are somehow inferior because they are not in MYP. The "yeshiva minyan" on campus, which students are encouraged to attend, happens to revolve around the MYP schedule and no other. The most prominent expenditure in the last five years has been the construction of the Glueck Beit Midrash, a wonderful building which I am extremely grateful for, but one which only services students in MYP. The "heart of our Yeshiva," President Joel often says, is the *beit midrash* – but doesn't that assign priority to MYP?

Students also perpetuate this ranking of programs. When students come back from *yeshivot* in Israel, especially the most prestigious ones, they often feel uncomfortable joining IBC or SBMP, even though these might be the most appropriate programs for them, either because of the subjects taught or the time commitment necessary. If it is true that no classes in IBC and SBMP are at the same level as the *shiurim* in MYP then that is something which the administration of the Jewish studies programs must change. But if such classes do exist, then we should be encouraging students who would benefit from these programs to enroll in IBC and SBMP, rather than creating a social atmosphere which discourages them from doing so.

My second comment revolves around two sentences in the last paragraph. "The status quo - and not just this year, but for as long as anyone can remember - is that some students clock their hours in the Beit Midrash while many others make the choices they should be entitled to as adults. That choice may be to dedicate that time to other types of learning, secular coursework, or even various forms of recreation (including, we'll not pretend not to notice, sleeping in)." Perhaps I'm over-reading, but it seems as if the author wants us to be allowed to have the choice to sleep instead of attending a Jewish studies program. At the very least, it is argued that because the Jewish studies programs are so inflexible, students end up sleeping in rather than attending them.

This argument is, well, silly. Are we really naïve enough to think that if the Jewish studies programs were more flexible, students who

watch YouTube videos now instead of attending them would suddenly change their minds? Deciding to come to Jewish studies classes has to be a personal choice. There is nothing we can do to encourage these students to come, except for one thing: attendance could be taken at morning *seder*. Unless attendance is taken at each of the four morning programs, students will simply choose the program which doesn't have attendance taken (hint: MYP) and enroll in it. Making the programs more flexible won't convince anyone to attend when sleeping or watching TV is an option.

Two years ago, I wrote an opinion piece for *The Commentator* in which I argued that students should not feel pressured to learn night *seder*. But when it comes to morning *seder*, or to attending a morning program in general, my feelings are completely different. Besides being an academic requirement, learning Torah is an integral part of YU. If you find that you'd prefer to sleep rather than attend morning *seder*, perhaps you should consider joining IBC or SBMP. Even if it were true that these programs are at a lower level, it would be absurd to choose not to join those programs because they are too easy for you – and then not go to morning *seder* because they don't take attendance there. If you care about learning Torah, pick a program where you'll actually learn it. I hope the administration of the Jewish studies programs will make an effort to help these students by ensuring that the IBC and SBMP programs offer classes at all levels and for as many different student interests as possible. But students have to make a choice to take advantage of what's offered here. The editorial emphasizes that we students are adults and are able to make our own choices. I wholeheartedly agree. You already made a choice to attend Yeshiva University, a university which places a primary focus on studying Torah. Now make another choice: find the morning program that best suits you, and show up.

Jerry Karp (YC '11) is majoring in physics and mathematics.



**Student Academic
Affairs Committee**

Dear Fellow Students,

The Student Academic Affairs Committee (SAAC) is happy to announce that, for the first time in the history of Yeshiva College, **we will be collecting and publishing course evaluations for student use.** Over the past year, members of the SAAC have met and spoken with deans, department chairs, and members of the faculty. As a result of these meetings, we were able to develop a course evaluation form whose results will be published online. Assembled and reviewed by a committee of dedicated students and faculty, we believe they represent a major first step towards providing you, the students, with valuable information about professors and their teaching styles to help you select the classes and professors that best match your learning styles and educational goals.

You will notice that this semester you will be receiving two course evaluation forms. The first form is the standard Yeshiva College form, and the second form is the SAAC form. While this redundancy will hopefully be eliminated in the future, it is a reality of the current pilot project. And though we know it is a pain, to make this pilot test a success, **it is imperative that you fill out both forms completely.** The Yeshiva College form will be used by the administration, while the data from the SAAC form will be made available to students. The SAAC results will not be available to the administration—only to students and the individual faculty member teaching the course. We are optimistic that the faculty will find our questionnaire valuable and that we will soon have one unified questionnaire that can be filled out online. We hope that both forms will provide students with valuable information about prospective classes and faculty with valuable feedback about their teaching. Please take both evaluations seriously; your responses are important to us!

The results from the SAAC evaluation will be published online as aggregate data (requiring banner ID and password) for all students to access at their leisure, along with syllabi and other information provided by the faculty member. The value of that information, and the success of this system, is contingent upon your participation. Every student who takes the time to respond to this survey honestly and candidly will benefit everyone else.

Thank you,
Members of the Student Academic Affairs Committee

*The
Commentator
wishes you a
chag sameach
and good luck
on finals!*

A Theology of Grades at YC: The Case of Prof. Snozzeldörf

By JESSE LEMPEL

What resides in a student's mind, above all and throughout, is a colony of grades; they are the merchandise of his intellect, the artifacts of his consciousness. Sometimes he juggles the letters he is given, then puts them in his backpack and carries them with him. They stick to him. While eating, while chatting, while reading and writing, the student is in their power. In the synagogue, as the Lord leans forward in His throne to inscribe the books of life and death, the student bows before the ineffable name and prays, "Dear God, please God, an ai and not an eff."

But, in our upward movement through the educational system, we are often left with a troubling question of academic theodicy: why do good students get bad grades, and vice versa? Are they earned or fated? Allow me to share my recent encounter with an offshoot of this confounding phenomenon.

A friend of mine took a class with a distinguished YC professor, who, to spare him public disgrace, we shall call Prof. Snozzeldörf. This friend received a C on his first paper. Frustrated, for the next paper he asked a student who took the class the previous semester (and got an A- on all of his papers), to send him his essays. Since it was an identical assignment as that of the semester prior, my friend plagiarized this paper and handed it in. One semester beforehand this same paper was graded A- by the selfsame Snozzeldörf, and yet, when my friend got his paper back, on its surface was scrawled – miracles, wonders, finger of God! – the twisted horseshoe, the sickle, a C once again.

What happened here? To my mind, the only reasonable explanation is that Prof. Snozzeldörf determined – whether on the basis of previous papers, classroom comments, dress and haircut, a dumb-sounding name, astrological sign, or any of a million other factors – that one boy is an A- student while the other was made for all C's. That it was essentially the same paper was irrelevant; he gave a grade to the boy, not to the page, and so it made perfect sense to criticize now what he admired then. Nothing else could explain such a large discrepancy. Professors, the human ones, are understandably subject to certain biases, but a drop like this is inexplicable: a C on a paper is a curse word, while an A- is a kiss. Any qualified teacher must be able to discern the difference; one cannot have both of those reactions to the same paper.

Due to fear of expulsion neither

of the students could complain, but I was riled by the professor's academic schizophrenia and decided to petition on their behalf. I met with a dean (who I will not name so that his outrageous and self-incriminating statements will not be used against him) and laid before him this baffling injustice. He, however, was far more concerned with the student's plagiarism than with what, in my mind, is the graver offense of outright professorial bias. It is graver precisely because it is committed by a paid and respected member of the faculty, rather than an average stu-

dent, and because it presumably is not limited to this individual case, but almost certainly represents a habitual Snozzeldörf policy of grading his students rather than their papers. But this dean heard none of it. His reply to me was confused, free-wheeling, and noteworthy. He defended the professor in various ways, arguing that a professor may change his mind and anyway it is perfectly legitimate to grade the same paper differently based on one's respect for its author. I was, of course, astounded to hear that chidush coming from a dean whose job it is to maintain academic integrity. He then floated the following surreal theory: perhaps Prof. Snozzeldörf sniffed out the cheating but lacked evidence to prove it, so he decided to compromise and give the alleged plagiarist a C. This dean, himself a professor, even admitted that he occasionally does that in his own classes. His defense for this policy was that, you know, it really is such a hassle to accuse a student of plagiarizing a paper, and especially if you can't really prove it, so, in that case, well you just give him a C and it's so much simpler that way, isn't it? As if compelled, I nodded my head in agreement. It really is much simpler that way. I wondered, in fact, why I hadn't thought of that myself.

Now, in this case I have the advantage of having read both papers and for various reasons I am quite certain that the professor did not notice the plagiarism. But it is for other reasons that the arguments of this dean did little to reassure me – rather the opposite, I think.

Unsatisfied, I then met with

Dean Eichler, and that was also a noteworthy experience. He too was far more interested in the plagiarism than in the erratic grading of Snozzeldörf. He had theories of his own as well, such as that the professor noticed the scam but was unwilling to report it because, due to his soft and loving heart, he considers the official penalty of expulsion too harsh. (As it happens, based on his syllabus and the impressions of several of his students, this professor would likely not harbor such misgivings.) Our meeting was a long one but doomed. Once more, the dean's con-

dean-cheeks, and as he continued speaking bullet-point paragraphs in repetition to emphasize the futility of our talk, his voice thinned out to a metallic poker, jabbing haphazardly and in staccato. Thus, on top of Snozzeldörf's shenanigans there is a blanket of indifference stretching across the offices of multiple deans, one of which engages himself in tricks and antics no more dignified. I do not know why this is so. Perhaps they feel it is less their job to police the integrity of the faculty than that of the students, or maybe they wish to avoid unpleasant encounters with their colleagues. It might even be that the deans have different reactions to similarly contemptible behavior depending on whether the perpetrator is teacher or student since, by heavenly decree or natural law, the professor gets an A- while the student is blessed with C's. It is nice when there is such consistency of bias in the world: isn't the universe wonderfully designed?

The case of Snozzeldörf is, in my opinion, a flagrant instance of direct bias in grading. But it is not just about Snozzeldörf. I suspect that many professors are afflicted,

to one degree or another and with a spectrum of subtlety, with academic schizophrenia. This is probably mostly restricted to the humanities, though even there there must be some professors who take measures (or meds) to counteract these biases, but still they exist.

Indeed, there are a whole host of factors endemic to the system which contribute to the peculiar mistranslation between academic achievement and G.P.A: the huge gap between easy teachers and hard teachers, general grade inflation, and grade penalties and rewards for procedural issues that do not affect the quality of the work or knowledge, such as lateness on assignments. No, the system is not perfect. But my encounter with the saga of Snozzeldörf and my journeys through the deans' offices revealed a more pointed failure. We witness the weakness, the paltry maturity of the PhDs. This is the indomitable pettiness of the ivory tower; it sits, in the end, on a kindergarten playground while its shadow blankets us with phony glory. And the student prays to God, "Please some aid," for no one wishes to be F'ed.



The Holocaust in America

Yeshiva College during World War II

COMPILED BY ELIE FRIEDMAN AND ADAM ZIMLOVER

The Commentator is beginning a series on the response of Yeshiva College students to the crisis of European Jewry in the 1930s and, subsequently, to the Holocaust. The first piece focuses on YU students' ignorance of the gravity of the Nazi threat and their assertion that America should not go to war against the Nazis. Reprinted alongside this piece are two excerpts from The Commentator's coverage of events in Europe. The first describes an anti-war demonstration attended by YU students; the second comes from a Purim edition parodying YC personnel by comparing them to Nazis.

As the Second World War raged in Europe, Americans largely remained ignorant of the extent of the Nazi regime's brutality. Newspapers around the country struggled to accurately report the ongoing events of the war. Misinformation was rampant, and conflicting stories regarding the Jews' treatment slowly trickled into America. We will examine how *The Commentator* covered the events leading up to the war and the war itself. Somewhat surprisingly, it appears that YC students initially remained opposed to American involvement in the War.

Modern American Jews might be surprised how Jewish students viewed a possible American entry into World War II. Far from rallying to save the Jews of Europe, the students at Yeshiva College were generally unabashed isolationists. Beginning already in the third issue of its existence, *The Commentator* published editorial after editorial decrying potential American involvement in the emerging conflict in Europe.

In commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the end of the First World War, *The Commentator* published an editorial urging college students to remain opposed to entering a new war, saying "the same mighty death struggle of imperialism dressed in modern phraseology is with us again!" and calling college students who hold peace assemblies throughout the country, "enlightened." The editorial staff urged Yeshiva students not only to reject war as an option, but to actively protest any potential American involvement in the war. As late as 1939, an editorial asserted,

[It is] our firm belief that America will not readily become involved in another world war. We believe that anti-war feeling has run deep into the consciousness of our national life and that the events of the past few years have but served to strengthen our resolve never to become parties again to a new world war.²

It is evident that these isolationist editorials reflected the general consensus of Yeshiva College students as well as of college students around the country. *The Commentator* publicized anti-war demonstrations, including a November - 1935 gathering in the Student Synagogue, where 300 students "enthusiastically participated in the Nationwide Mobilization for Peace."³



Similarly, a 1936 editorial called for "a militant student front against war."⁴ This attitude was not unique to Yeshiva, as reported in a 1935 survey by the Associated Collegiate Press. According to the survey, "college students can be expected to oppose vigorously and actively any effort to drag the United States into the general European war..."⁵ One might have assumed that due to the peril faced by European Jewry, Yeshiva students would have been more willing to support American intervention. However, this clearly was not the case.

The students' apparent indifference to the plight of European Jewry appears to have stemmed from their inability to perceive the eventual genocide. It is not possible that the students would have willingly turned a blind eye to their brethren. Until at least 1939, it is evident that American Jewry did not suspect the danger that the Jews in Europe faced. We can also see this from the morbidly ironic usage of specific words in a pre-Holocaust world. They repeatedly use the words "holocaust" as a term for what would happen if America participated in another war⁶. They call on readers to "protest against the insidious forces fomenting war and Fascism in this country."⁷ The disaster, to them, would not come from staying out of the war, but from going in.

However, the most striking example of their ignorance of the unfolding calamity in Europe is the light-hearted manner in which they repeatedly refer to the Nazis. The 1939 Purim edition of *The Commentator* has multiple quips about Nazis, ones that would certainly be considered offensive if published today.⁸ One headline read "Assimilators Expelled as Novel Non-Aryan Policy Takes Effect" and joked about a new "Non-Aryan policy" at Yeshiva. In jest, they refer to a "Propaganda Minister" at Yeshiva College. Another article refers to a Professor as the "uber-Fuherer" and talks about "Ratzis," apparently a contraction of Rabbi and Nazi. A news article in March 1940 mentions an incident where the Sophomore class woke up the Dormitory yelling "The Nazis are here," "run for cover," and "stop, please stop."⁹

The Commentator
April 8, 1935

"The Peace Strike"

Unfortunately, the fact that no classes are scheduled in Yeshiva College the morning of April 12- the date dedicated to the nationwide student peace demonstration- renders it impossible for us to manifest a concrete, visible protest against the forces fomenting war and Fascism in this country.

We wish to take this opportunity of expressing editorially our direct and unmitigated condemnation of war...The student body of Yeshiva College places itself firmly and enthusiastically behind those organizations dedicated to the preservation of peace. The various student groups deserve the highest praise for their initiatives in organizing the peace demonstrations. Yeshiva College considers itself in the ranks of the marchers.

The Commentator, Purim Edition
March 1, 1939

"Assimilators Expelled As Novel Non-Aryan Policy Takes Effect"

In line with the revolutionary non-Aryan race theory advanced yesterday by Dr. Mordecai Gabriel head of the biology department of Yeshiva College...the institution announces that assimilators of the fifteenth generation are to be expelled from the school. The new theory emphasized the supremacy of pure-blooded non-Aryans of fine Oriental stock over the flaxenhaired Occidental "ghosts." All news in Yeshiva College is under strict censorship of Propaganda Minister Joseph. T. Ripley...



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A Modest Encounter

An Interview with Yousef Zeidan, Legal Adviser at the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED

By UDI GREENBOIM

INTRODUCTION BY MICAH STEIN

Inevitably, a Yeshiva University education involves serious academic and experiential sacrifices. Of course, YU offers an unparalleled Torah education, but it comes at the expense of institutional diversity of opinion, color, and experience. On the whole, while it may be a fair trade, in some circumstances the atmosphere of uniformity atrophies our sense of passion and engagement. We argue over the minutiae of faith, practice, and ideology precisely because the student body represents a diverse collection of thought on this narrow range of issues. But larger cultural and political issues? How can you debate when there is no other side?

Freshman Udi Greenboim sought out the other side. Below is the transcript of an interview he conducted with Palestinian adviser Yousef Zeidan, a Palestinian living and working in New York City. Be forewarned: you will likely disagree with nearly everything that Mr. Zeidan says. And that is the point. Mr. Greenboim was not interested in a debate or argument, but simply wanted an opportunity to hear from the other side in its own words. Don't worry, we've also included a response by YU student and Israel activist Yitzchak Bronstein. While it is crucial to provide an outlet for free speech, it is equally important to demand facts and foster debate.

But politics aside, Mr. Zeidan reminds us that there are smart, dedicated people on both sides of the Israel/Palestine conflict. Pay close attention to his painful personal anecdotes, deep sense of outrage, and feeling of victimization. They are all genuine. As defenders of Israel we must learn to listen and respond to Palestinians, mirroring their commitment and passion. This interview might be a good place to start.

Interviewer's note: *I disagree with Mr. Zeidan on nearly every political point we discussed. At the same time, it's impossible to deny his sincerity, openness, and genuine interest in dialogue. Every political situation has multiple perspectives that deserve to be heard – even the ones we completely disagree with. This type of dialogue allows us to understand the other side while simultaneously crystallizing our own position and principles. Mr. Zeidan's interpretation of current events and his portrayal of the Palestinian people as absolute victims may go against everything we believe, but in the international realm his opinion is viewed legitimately, if not sympa-*

thetically. This is precisely why we need to talk. While I don't agree with his opinions, I have grown tremendously from this experience both as a Jew, American, Israeli, and a student of Yeshiva University.

Udi Greenboim: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me Mr. Zeidan. Please tell me about yourself.

Yousef Zeidan: I was born in the United States; I am Palestinian-American. My parents were both born in Jerusalem. I have a very deep connection to Palestine and the Palestinian people. I have a Master's

the Palestinian Mission to the UN, I began the interview process for an internship at the Palestinian Mission to the UN, where I interned for about a year and half while I finished my graduate studies at Seton Hall. Right before I graduated. I applied at the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations as an Adviser, and was told that I would have a position once I completed my Master's degree – most people in the UN have at least a Masters degree. I am now a legal officer and I follow the legal committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations as a representative of Palestine.

on one: in December 2008, a few days after Christmas, everyone was off work and away on break, and all of a sudden the Gaza war had begun, and we called for an emergency meeting in the Security Council. Seeing the politics evolving *vis-à-vis* the situation made me aware of the double standard when it came to Palestinian civilians at risk or under attack.

UG: Would you care to expand on what you mean by "double standard"?

YZ: For example, yesterday I had to reschedule our meeting because the UN Security Council con-

to be a solution this year with Palestinian National Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who has a two year plan to strengthen the institutions of the State and get ready for independence. The plan is due for completion in August of this year, and the EU said they expect an agreement by September 2011 and even the World Bank said the Palestinian National Authority is ready for Statehood at any time in the near future. This is because Palestinians *are* ready for independence. The region is now experiencing a wave of democracy and freedom, because they should have a free voice and free life akin to that of Australians or Belgians or any other people on earth.

UG: Again, why do you think there is a double standard?

YZ: AIPAC influences Congress with contributions and has made it as if doing anything against Israel is anti-Semitic. It's not anti-Semitic – there are many members of Congress who are "more Catholic than the Pope," so to say, as even Israelis condemn what the Israeli government does, but it seems impossible for Congress to do so.

UG: What are the "six core issues"?

YZ: The six core, or final status, issues are: (1) Jerusalem, (2) borders, (3) security, (4) Palestinian Refugees, (5) water, and (6) Israeli settlements.

UG: What do you think a YU student is unaware of that is important they know?

YZ: That Israel is not perfect – no one is on either side – and continuing with another 43 years of foreign occupation is not going to help Israel or anyone else in moving towards a peaceful agreement. I am personally, and the majority of Palestinians are, willing to sit down and discuss with anyone these issues, we are just looking for chances like this [interview] for you to talk to us.

This way, we will be able to tell each other our feelings and show the other side that nothing justifies the longest foreign occupation in modern history, that [Israel] is entrenching itself in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, with settlements and other activity is in violation of international law.

UG: There is a general sense among pro-Israel activists at YU that some media entities are biased against the Israeli cause. How do you feel about the media's role in conveying the Palestinian perspective?

YZ: I don't think anyone could rely on the media if they sought real

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and Bachelor's degree in Diplomacy and International Relations from the John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations at Seton Hall University.

UG: When did you first visit Palestine or get involved with the Palestinian cause?

YZ: My family came to the United States from Palestine in the 1970s and have kept the Palestinian culture alive and well within our family since. I spent most of my summers in Palestine visiting family and the country. I grew up speaking Arabic, even having a tutor, and naturally became part of the culture. I lived in Palestine for about a year, but I was too young to remember any of it.

UG: What was your path to the UN? What does your current job entail?

YZ: I began as an intern at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for about three months, and then from there, as I became more interested in work of

UG: How have your political positions been shaped by personal experience?

YZ: The UN in New York is a school unto itself in terms of shaping the way you think, and it's a sobering experience. Through the experience, I have become more committed to the Palestinian cause based on international law and international humanitarian law, which is paramount to our work. And as a Palestinian I feel as if I have a personal responsibility to defend those living under Israel's nearly 44-year foreign military occupation, the longest in modern history.

UG: How have your personal experiences shaped your political opinions?

YZ: Well, when you're subjected to humiliation at an Israeli checkpoint by Israel soldiers with big guns, it's easy to assume that the checkpoint is demoralizing.

UG: What is your most memorable experience in the UN?

YZ: I have many, but I'll focus

vened a meeting to declare a "no fly zone" over Libya. The whole situation was taken care of in a rapid and quick manner, and as opposed to the Palestinian situation, using all mechanisms necessary, including referral of the case of Libya to the International Criminal Court, the UN was much quicker to act in this case. On February 18 the double standard was again in effect, since the US vetoed the draft resolution which condemned Israeli settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, that was co-sponsored by 135 countries. It had 14 votes in favor [from the Security Council] while only the US vetoed the resolution. There is very little condemnation of the illegal settlements in Israel.

UG: Why do you think there is a "double standard"?

YZ: The US takes a pro-Israel stance because of lobbies such as AIPAC, instead of justice, liberty, and responsibility, which get forgotten in this situation. There needs

continued from previous page

information and justice. The media is made for ratings. In my opinion, it's better for us to read books about the situation; I recommend many books by Israeli writer Ilan Pappé.

UG: Last month, a horrible incident happened in Itamar – what is your feeling on the matter?

YZ: Nothing justifies killing kids, which is heartbreaking, and we condemn the attack on any civilians and want justice.

However, Israel is so isolated internationally and used this incident to attack the Palestinian government. The [Palestinian] government still wants to know who is responsible for this crime, and while there was no arrest made, they did round up all the foreign workers, many of them Thai. Apparently, it has been reported that a Thai worker who worked for the family was not paid for his work and an argument erupted. The Israeli government has pointed a finger at the [Palestinian] people, which is unfair, and President Abbas condemned the attack and has pledged the support of the Palestinian security forces to assist in the investigations. Even more so, it is unfair to use a crime like this as a political tool to keep building settlements, which are illegal under the 4th Geneva Convention. This only deepens the divide and is not beneficial to Israel.

UG: One of the demands from Israel in exchange for a two state solution is that Israel be recognized as a Jewish state. Why has this been an issue?

YZ: Israel has to determine for itself what it wants to be, it's not for Palestine to decide if Israel is a Jewish State, or even a blue or green state. But we have to keep in mind the 1.5 million Palestinians who are Israeli citizens, both Christians and Muslims, we need to make sure that their human rights are upheld and there isn't a situation of Apartheid, where one group benefits from certain laws, while the others are being deprived.

UG: Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered 95 % of the settlements to Yasir Arafat in exchange for peace, why was there not a deal done then?

YZ: Arafat would not accept a deal without provisions on Jerusalem, or a deal that did not include Jerusalem. Olmert's situation was different since they suggested a swap; however, the ratio for the swapped land in Jerusalem was uneven. The swap must equal the value of the '67 border. If there was an agreement for Israel to keep any part beyond the 1967 border, it must be exchanged for equivalent *value*, not only sq. footage alone. For example, land in Jerusalem is more valuable than land in the Negev Desert.

UG: What is Palestine's role at the United Nations?

YZ: Palestine is not a member of the UN because you need to apply to the Security Council, and we

have consistently been rejected by the United States. We are an observer mission with all entitlements except voting. We sponsor resolutions, about sixteen a year in the General Assembly, regarding the question of Palestine and including resolutions on settlements and assistance to the Palestinian people. Usually we are with the majority – about 170 countries vote in favor of most of these resolutions, while only a handful vote against these such as Israel, US, Palau, Nauru and Micronesia.

UG: I have heard that there are anti-Palestinian stereotypes even within the Muslim world. Why is that?

YZ: After being expelled from Palestine by Zionist armies, Palestinians have a very tough time being refugees, but we have become a very educated people – we even have the highest per capita PhDs in the Middle East.

UG: Being a YU student, I don't often get a chance to hear from a Palestinian, can you tell me a particular story that really stands out?

YZ: In 2009, I was back in Jerusalem; we have my grandfather's house there and you can see the Old City from the window. However, it is almost impossible for me to go there. Because of my race and religion, going past checkpoints is nearly impossible even though I am also American. Soldiers made degrading comments, I was humiliated and went back home; it is hurtful that I can't go there while Ethiopians who come to this land from a faraway place can go and even live there. The whole thing is very hard to swallow since I'm from there and because I am not Jewish I am treated differently. This won't last, it can't last, it hurts values, and chances for peace.

UG: Yeshiva University is a Jewish institution. Most of the students study abroad in Israel and maintain a strong connection to Israel, yet very few have ever had a meaningful encounter with a Palestinian, or even someone who supports the Palestinian cause. If you had anything to tell the YU student base what would it be?

YZ: That it is important to build strong relationships, since they provide greater knowledge of the others side's situation and perspective. Also, we should take that knowledge and use it to the best of our ability, since there is always something to learn from the other side.

Young Jews, like young Palestinians, who are serious about peace with a two state solution, with an agreement to the six core issues have a responsibility to search for peace. To talk with one another without prejudice will show that maybe the predetermined notions that we hold are stereotypical. We need to sit together because we both don't like the status quo – being subject to cruel acts by the other side, or anyone else for that matter.

A Response to the Interview with Yousef Zeidan

By YITZHAK BRONSTEIN

I would first like to express thanks to Udi Greenboim for reaching out to Mr. Zeidan, and to Mr. Zeidan for taking the time to interview with Udi. The significance of understanding the perspective of someone on the other side of a conflict should never be underscored – particularly in an insular environment like Yeshiva University, where the homogeneity of our student body can often lead to the demonization of those with different backgrounds. In this respect, it's a pleasure to see an interview with Mr. Zeidan in *The Commentator* just a short time after the "Palestinian Wall of Lies" was erected in Furst Hall. Mr. Zeidan's calls for free dialogue between Jewish and Palestinian students and his emphasis on the importance of building strong relationships are well received. None-

natories – in addition to the support of the entire Security Council – and Mr. Zeidan has the audacity to say that there is an anti-Palestine bias in the United Nations?

If there is bias in the United Nations vis-a-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is most certainly against the State of Israel. In the most recent meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council at the end of March, there were six resolutions raised against the State of Israel. There was one against Iran; none against Libya. Prior to this session, out of the 51 resolutions of the UNHRC targeting individual countries, 35 of them targeted Israel, mostly criticizing its treatment of the Palestinians. As such, Mr. Zeidan's claim of anti-Palestinian bias in the United Nations falls on deaf ears.

Mr. Zeidan then goes on to blame this perceived "bias" in the United

Israeli historian Benny Morris had this to say about Pappé in *The New Republic*: "At best, Ilan Pappé must be one of the world's sloppiest historians; at worst, one of the most dishonest." He followed with a thorough debunking of myths that Pappé passes off as "history," and it's certainly not the first time that an Israeli historian has done so against Pappé either.

Mr. Zeidan's unwillingness to recognize Israel as a Jewish state reflects the official policy of the Palestinian Authority, but the final line of the interview raises serious doubt about Mr. Zeidan's true intentions. There, while bemoaning the fact that Jews have the ability to take advantage of the Law of Return and become Israeli citizens while Palestinian do not, he concludes by saying: "This won't last, it can't last, it hurts values, and chances for peace." Mr. Zeidan's lip service to

In reality, the United States government supports Israel because a majority of Americans have consistently supported the State of Israel since its creation. It should be fairly obvious that this is how a democracy functions.

theless, I do take serious issue with some of the claims of Mr. Zeidan, and felt it appropriate to respond.

The first concern of mine relates to Mr. Zeidan's account of the double-standard that exists in the United Nations against the Palestinians, and of his explanation as to why it exists. As an example, Zeidan claims that "there is very little condemnation of the illegal settlements in Israel." However, if one reads Mr. Zeidan's own words, one will learn that as recently as this past February 18, a resolution that strongly condemned Israeli settlement growth was supported by the overwhelming majority of the General Assembly and by 14 out of the 15 members of the Security Council. The one veto – the United States – was not because the resolution was inconsistent with U.S. policy, but because of other political considerations. U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice even stated explicitly that the United States agrees in principle with the resolution regarding "the folly and illegitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity." In other words, a recent resolution supporting the Palestinian cause receives over 135 sig-

States on the power of the pro-Israel lobbies, mentioning AIPAC in particular. If not for the existence of the pro-Israel lobbying groups, we are led to believe that the United States would cease supporting Israel. This claim is ludicrous, but one that has received more attention in recent years after Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer published "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," defending this thesis. In reality, the United States government supports Israel because a majority of Americans have consistently supported the State of Israel since its creation. It should be fairly obvious that this is how a democracy functions. A Gallup poll that was released on February 24 found that support for Israel in the United States was "near [a] record high."

In response to a question about media bias in reporting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Zeidan recommends that students read more objective sources, such as "many books by Israeli writer Ilan Pappé." Pappé is a vocal anti-Zionist whose vicious hatred of the State of Israel permeates all of his writings. For example, on March 17, the renowned

a two-state settlement is compromised by his own admission in this response. As one who believes that Israel *can* and *should* continue to exist as a Jewish state, I hope to see the Law of Return continued indefinitely. The Jewish people have the right to self-determination in their homeland, and Jews everywhere should continue to possess the right to become Israeli citizens. If Mr. Zeidan truly believes in two states for two peoples, why does he think that this status quo is unable to continue? I find this line by Mr. Zeidan to be extremely troubling and inconsistent with his support of a two-state settlement.

To conclude, there are other several other points of criticism that I have neglected to point out, but I felt that certain claims deserved explicit mention. While I do appreciate Mr. Zeidan's desire to address the Yeshiva University student body, some of his points raise serious doubt as to the seriousness and integrity of the delegation he represents.

Yitzhak is a junior majoring in Philosophy.

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Enter the Cholent

continued from front page

petizing – and looking doesn't help either – but cholent has overcome these aesthetic speed bumps to become the most popular, enduring, and important food in the Jewish world today. After all, no one is clamoring for a gefilte fish bake-off or a chopped liver grind-off. Instead, they seek cholent in all its infinite variables and nuances.

It is the snowflake of stews, identical from a distance but exquisitely unique up close. Any aficionado will tell you that each pot of cholent tells its own story; that no two batches have ever come out the same; that the ingredients seem to matter less than the care and love that go into making it. They'll also tell you that it is uniquely delicious.

Buried beneath layers of potato, meat, beans, and barley, these sixteen crock pots have become the clairvoyant equivalent of Yiddish tea leaves – if you know how to read them properly – guarding the answer to arguably the most significant questions facing Orthodox Judaism today:

What makes a good cholent?

What does that mean for the Jewish people?

Welcome to the 2011 Yeshiva University Cholent Cook-Off, a competition that transcends the typical culinary metrics of taste, texture, and appearance to include such intangible factors as faith, tradition, family, and innovation. On Wednesday, April 6, sixteen teams of YU students assembled in Weisberg Commons to whip up their own champion batch of cholent – a slow-

cooked beef stew traditionally eaten on Sabbath afternoon – and submit it to the discriminating palates of seven expert judges. The winning team would take home an incalculable measure of pride, glory...and an iPod touch.

Got your attention?

However, the prizes – which also included restaurant gift certificates and cafeteria money – were secondary for most of the contestants, who competed primarily for bragging rights and ego points, eager to demonstrate the superiority of their cholent methodology. The mood on that Wednesday night was congenial but competitive, as rival teams maintained a calculated distance in order to protect their secret arsenal of ingredients. In this competition, “victory” meant more than just first place.

At the same time, the notion of crowning a “winning” cholent felt sacrilegious somehow, roughly akin to choosing the world's best mother. Who could possibly claim the culinary, historical, and religious authority to determine what good cholent *should* be? And how can a group of culinary experts identify the “best” cholent when the very nature of the food transcends mere taste?

Of course, there had to be a winner, leaving the judges in a delicate situation. For many teams, this competition was a referendum on family tradition, a chance to celebrate the authenticity of family recipes tracing back centuries. For others, tradition took a back seat to innovation, as certain teams felt compelled to experiment with ingredients that Bubbe may not have recognized in

the Old Country.

In either case, each team embodied a distinct philosophy and vision for what cholent should be, and by extension, what Judaism should be. It's amazing what meat and potatoes can represent.

Historically, cholent developed as an attempt to reconcile the parallel and paradoxical obligations of the Jewish Sabbath. The Sabbath is meant as a restful and joyous day – “a delight” according to the prophet Isaiah – complete with hot, festive meals. At the same time, the Bible commands “You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day” (Exodus 35:3), and the rabbis include cooking as one of the thirty-nine categories of labor prohibited on the Sabbath.

This conundrum was disputed and debated over thirty pages of Talmudic text, ultimately yielding the legalistic solution: one may leave a pot of partially cooked food on the stove to continue cooking over the Sabbath as long as he does not stoke the coals.

Enter cholent. Guided by the Talmudic ruling, diverse communities of Diaspora Jews simultaneously developed their own hot Sabbath foods, assimilating local ingredients, influence, and names. In this manner, the development of cholent followed an evolutionary model of adaptation and descent. The resulting creations are generally similar but specifically unique, as diverse and nuanced as the people and cultures that produced them.

This parallel development has also made it nearly impossible to pinpoint the first cholent in history.

Baladhuri, a seventh century Arab historian, records that Yemenite Jews prepared *harisa*, a coarse wheat dough stuffed with meat and spices and slowly cooked overnight on the Sabbath. The isolated Jews of Kurdistan enjoyed *mabote*, made from ground wheat, chick peas, and stuffed cow intestines. And Persians ate *khalebibi*, a casserole of beef, turnips, leek, cabbage, beans, lentils, and rice that resembles European cholent in many respects.

But cholent as a beef-bean-potato stew did not appear until the 12th century, where it is first mentioned by Rabbi Isaac of Vilna in a tangential discussion of Jewish dietary laws. According to Rabbi Isaac's account, the consumption and preparation of cholent had become a communal affair, with families bringing their uncooked stews to the local baker, who kept a stove lit throughout the Sabbath. On Saturday afternoon, each family would retrieve their pot, which had slow-cooked overnight.

Cholent later gained genuine religious significance as part of a dogmatic debate between Rabbinic Jews and Karaites in the fourteenth century. The Karaites, a small sect of Biblical literalists, rejected the Talmud's cooking loophole and thus refused to prepare or eat cholent on the Sabbath. Cholent became a distinguishing marker between the two groups, leading to an increased emphasis within the Rabbinic community on preparing and serving hot foods on the Sabbath. Abudraham, a Spanish Rabbi, even ruled that any Jew who did not eat hot foods on the Sabbath was flirting with heresy.

By the 20th century, cholent had

become uniquely – in some cases prohibitively – Jewish. In one apocryphal story recorded in the Israeli newspaper *Mishpacha*, a prominent Hassidic Rabbi cast aspersions on the lineage of an Eastern European student who had recently become religious but did not like cholent. Drawing on the Abudraham's obscure fourteenth century ruling, the rabbi declared that this student obviously lacked legitimate Jewish heritage and must undergo a conversion. Which he did.

By Thursday afternoon, the smell in Weisberg Commons was intoxicating. After simmering for sixteen hours, the pots of cholent had coalesced and congealed, transforming from individual ingredients into a uniform whole. Hundreds of students, staff members, and visitors prowled the room with fork in hand, eager to sample the competing cholents and test their own palates against the expert judges.

The range of flavor and texture derived from each group's “secret ingredients.” At the Cholent Cook-Off, all sixteen teams began the competition with the same staple ingredients – meat, potatoes, onion, barley, beans, and ketchup – while adding five of their own “secret ingredients.” The teams ultimately produced sixteen unique creations, manipulating the collective and individual ingredients to generate tastes that ranged from “well-balanced” to “subtle” to “rich,” according to the judges.

One group overtly embraced the historical roots and significance of cholent. Calling themselves Alte Heim (Yiddish for *Old Country*), the teams was comprised exclusively of grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. Striving for a cholent “as authentic as Warsaw in 1930,” chef Aryeh Samuel used his grandmother's recipe from pre-war Europe. The secret, he said, was no secret – Team Alte Heim stuck with humble and basic ingredients, using grated potatoes and finely chopped onions to create an almost creamy texture and robust taste. They received a score of 55 (out of 70) from the judges, seizing the early lead.

The Herring, a team of Toronto natives, opted for a more layered approach, utilizing hot sauce and maple syrup as their dual flavors. “Cholent is a battle waged overnight” explained team member Avi Gordon, “and what emerges from that battle is the synthesis that is cholent.” Unfortunately, the judges found their “synthesis” cloying rather than complimentary – The Herring received a 43.

As the judges moved from pot to pot, they found the competing cholents solid but unspectacular. One group had created a “dessert cholent,” according to the judges, which sounds simultaneously horrifying and irresistible. Another cholent came out too loose, forcing the team leader to explain that “it is meant to

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continued from previous page

be eaten with crusty bread!" Alas, there was no bread to be found – they received a 41.

But no team could catch Alte Heim. With only five pots remaining, they clung to a narrow lead and seemed destined for victory. It felt right, somehow. Their history-laden stew represented something more than meat and potatoes – it was an edible personification of traditional Jewish thought, the sense that modernity and innovation can never improve on the Eastern European experience. A victory would demonstrate that the Shtetl still stands tall against 21st century culinary advancement. And by extension, 21st century *everything*.

What is it about cholent?

Sure, it's legitimately tasty and fairly easy to make, but at the end of the day it comes down to "a good beef stew with beans," according to judge Alan Riesenburger, catering director and executive chef of Fairway Market. When did cholent develop into the representative Jewish meal? More elusively, *why*?

It's almost too easy to draw touching and corny conclusions about the significance of cholent to the Jewish people. It serves as the perfect metaphor for unity, community, and collaboration. It can represent the melting pot of modernity or the timeless resonance of history. "It represents the essential contribution that every Jew – like every ingredient – makes to the Jewish People,"

explained one student, "it shows that together we are greater than any of us alone."

Of course the ingredients, proportions, and cooking time all matter, but a good cholent is hardly about taste alone. For some, it represents family. Riesenburger began to wax nostalgic about eating cholent as a child at his grandmother's house in South Africa. "I think the best way to describe it," he said, "is comfort food. It's soul food."

Others emphasized the communal experience of eating cholent. "You can't eat cholent by yourself," explained judge Elan Kornblum, president and publisher of Great Kosher Restaurants Magazine. "It is family, warmth, comfort, community."

Maybe it is the symphony of ingredients: "With a good cholent, everything works," said YU Housing director Jonathan Mantell, "it's like an orchestra coming together."

All agree that cholent cannot be captured by ingredients alone. "Cholent, after all, is much more than a casserole that starts cooking on Friday and gets eaten on Saturday," according to Israeli chef Sherry Ansky, author of the cholent cookbook *Hamin*. "It is the meal, the guests, the preparations, the aroma. The ability of every cook, man or woman, to put in their own special additions."

Some contestants traced cholent back even further. "I think God made the first cholent," said one hopeful chef. "Yeah, that was the primordial soup."

The judges betrayed their own cholent ideologies through distinct evaluation styles and criteria. Alana Newhouse, editor-in-chief of *Tablet* magazine, opted for first-impression scores while preferring savory flavors; Dr. Esther Joel emphasized the importance of spice and "heat"; Jamie Geller, author of *Quick & Kosher: Recipes From The Bride Who Knew Nothing*, preferred honey and coarse black pepper.

Chef Avram Wiseman, senior culinary instructor at the Center for Kosher Culinary Arts played the part of deconstructionist, judging each cholent based on categories of taste, seasoning, texture, and color. Marking notes on a legal pad, Wiseman would practically imbibe the cholent, absorbing the bouquet of flavor and aroma. He specifically sought to avoid making an intuitive judgment, he said, given the time and effort that the teams had invested in their creations.

But can one really deconstruct a cholent? Can it ever be anything more or less than the sumptuous whole?

The first Cholent Cook-Off took place in 2007. YU Housing director Jonathan Mantell and assistant director Sean Hirschorn developed the idea for a competition as a means of boosting student involvement and generating a sense of buzz around campus. The two settled on a Top Chef-style food competition. But what would students make? "We're YU," advised Dean Victor Schwartz, "we do cholent."

After a two-year hiatus, the Cook-Off returned last year with a bang. The event received publicity in the New York Times *Events* section, and the competition itself came down to the wire. While some groups opted for novelty rather than excellence (even a year later, a grotesque chocolate, marshmallow, and graham cracker concoction stood out to Mantell and Hirschorn), three teams tied for the lead after the round of expert judging. They called in YU President Richard Joel to break the tie. In perhaps the greatest perk of his job, President Joel crowned Team Heerlijk as the Cook-Off champions, praising their cholent as "quite tasty."

What began as a modest student competition has blossomed into must-see event. At this year's competition, YU's weekly radio show "Who's on Furst?" ran a live broadcast from Weisberg Commons, while a reporter covered the event for The Jewish Network. In addition to raising school spirit, the competition also raised money for local charities: "The charity component is one of the main ingredients, so to speak, of this event," said Mantell. Last year's competition benefited the Upper Manhattan Food Bank, while this year, each team's \$20 entry fee went to Students Helping Students, a YU scholarship program.

In the end, tradition gave way to innovation. Alte Heim and their Shtetl cholent were soon usurped by Team Mofongo, which earned a resounding score of 63 from the judges and garnered especially high marks for cultivating a balanced, robust flavor. Their secret? "A special blend of middle eastern spices," according to team chef Jon Adler, highlighted by notes of cumin.

Adler had been perfecting the recipe for nearly eight months: "I've been making this cholent every week since school started in September," he said. The judges appreciated Mofongo's culinary maturity, as chef Wiseman commented, "it didn't have that barbeque sauce sweetness that other groups had; this cholent was memorable."

The ingredients followed no established recipe – certainly nothing from pre-war Europe – and instead reflected Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and American influences. As much as any team, Mofongo embraced the malleable nature of cholent, lacking tradition with a healthy dose of modern innovation.

Perhaps Mofongo's victory over Alte Heim reflects the evolving palate – and religious sensibilities – of the American Jewish community. Perhaps the melding of Ashkenazic and Sephardic tastes along with the addition of novel ingredients marks the end of tradition as the all-powerful guiding force. After all, if cholent can adapt, is anything truly sacred?

At the end of the day, only the pots remained. They sat alone in the empty auditorium, bearing the burnt, crusty remnants of meat, potatoes, barley, and 2000 years of Jewish history. Discarded plates and forks framed the pots as a record of the carnivorous tornado that came and went over the course of a single hour. All the pots were empty – the good and the bad alike, – stripped clean by students and adults eager to sample the past and future of the Jewish people.

How does it taste?

"Very delicious," said President Richard Joel. "Very succulent. It's filling, it has a spicy kick to it – very lovely."

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Shabbat Project: Week Two

Johnson & Wales: *Shabbat on the Island*

BY SIMEON BOTWINICK

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND – I should perhaps start by noting that a weekend at Johnson & Wales is not for the casual Shabbat traveler. The distance alone is enough to scare off anyone who thinks the east side of Manhattan might as well be in Azerbaijan, and, although Amtrak and random bus services (think: Peter Pan Bus Lines) do go to Rhode Island, the easiest and cheapest way to get to Providence still remains making the 3.5 hour trip in your own (or a friend's) car.

The lack of a large Jewish community might also discourage those who wouldn't dream of visiting a town without a kosher pizza shop, and who tend to think of Southern New Jersey as "out there." There's no Friday afternoon hanging out at the local kosher Dunkin' Donuts, or birthday parties at Yerachmiel's Heimische Bakery. Honestly, even *minyanim* are sometimes hard to come by – the closest one might be a 20- to 30-minute walk from where you stay.

But if you're the type to classify these inconveniences as "minor," or if you're simply looking for a different type of Shabbat experience, Johnson & Wales may just be what you've been waiting for.

For starters, J&W is not your typical undergraduate experience. Most students there are enrolled in one of the several programs of study offered by the university, including business and technology. Most Jews you find there, however, will likely have been drawn to the two unique areas in which J&W excels: a hospitality program (a field which includes restaurants, hotels, theme parks, and tourism) ranked among America's top three, and a culinary arts program among the largest and most well-respected in the world.

Although J&W's small Jewish population means that you won't have the option of five *minchas* to choose from, it also means that you'll find a warm community atmosphere

that few other campuses can match. You may only find ten or so Jews at *minyan* or meals, but you can be sure that all ten of them will come over to say hi and genuinely want to get to know you. And when you go back to wherever you're staying to have Shabbat lunch, you can expect to have guests stopping by to share dessert, sing *zemirot*, play games, and hang out.

The modest size of the Jewish community at J&W also guarantees that your presence there won't go unappreciated. If you're male, you quite literally might be making the *minyan*, and, whatever your gender, any *ruach* you bring will energize the Jewish students there who aren't used to seeing other religious people their age. Your very presence will likely draw Jewish students who usually don't attend Shabbat *minyan* or meals.

There's no kosher cafeteria at J&W, and, although the students often order in from a kosher caterer for Friday night meals at Hillel, lunch on Shabbat day is generally homemade. This is a wonderful thing, as you might imagine would be the case at a culinary arts college. If you're coming from New York or any other place where kosher supermarkets are bountiful, whatever food you can contribute to the meal will likely be greatly appreciated, so it's best to check with your hosts beforehand to ask if they need anything.

The last piece worth mentioning is the city itself. Providence is beautiful. Whichever of its nicknames you prefer (popular ones include "The Beehive of Industry," "The Renaissance City," and "The Creative Capital"), its regal architecture, alternatively quaint and modern streets, rolling hills, and seaside views make it worth visiting for the scenery alone. If you were looking for a tourist destination, but still needed a nice place to spend Shabbat, then Johnson & Wales just may be the final puzzle piece you were looking for.



RATINGS

Food- 3/5

ACCOMMODATIONS- 2/5 (depending on how many people you come with, you may end up sleeping on someone's floor)

RUACH- 2/5 (if you go with a group, you'll likely be the life of the minyan)

GRACIOUSNESS- 5/5

OVERALL SCORE- 2.5/5

Weak Side

1. 3.5 hour car trip means you need to get an early head start on Friday or risk ending up in Pawcatuck for Shabbat.
2. Not many religious Jews there means you probably won't be able to practice your Jewish Geography skills.
3. Much walking required to get places might force you to end up in shape by the end of the weekend.
4. Lack of minyan options may mean you end up choosing between a 9:00 Conservative minyan at the Brown Hillel, or a 12:00 Lubavitch minyan at the local Chabad.

Strong Side

1. Road trips great for bonding with friends/strangers/animals you pick up who need a ride to Rhode Island.
2. Small number of religious Jews means you'll end up best friends (or arch-nemeses) with all of them.
3. Beautiful architecture and scenery mean that, despite your best attempts, you stand a heavy risk of emerging more cultured.
4. Probably more than anywhere else you could go, your presence will be noticed and appreciated.

NYU's *Shabbat for 2000*

BY RONI ZEMELMAN

NEW YORK, NEW YORK – Covering over 142,000 square feet and containing five levels, NYU's enormous Coles Sports Center serves as the central workout facility for NYU students, and houses the basketball court for NYU's basketball team, the Violets. It has hosted NCAA Men and Women's basketball championships, regional wrestling championships, fencing championships, and countless games of squash. But on this night, that arena would host arguably the most physically demanding and emotionally taxing sporting event: almost 2000 Jews eating a Shabbat dinner.

Let the games begin.

From March 25-26, approximately 1800 people converged at NYU for the annual "Shabbat for 2000" weekend, the largest student-run Jewish initiative in the country, which provides free meals, shiurim, and accommodations to undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members for Shabbat. Invited by a close friend of mine from Cleveland, I graciously accepted the opportunity to experience this unique program.

Before Shabbat, Jonah Wilkof (YC '13) and I entered NYU's Bronfman Center to check-in with student representatives, find out our respective tables, and receive green wristbands, pre-requisites for entering the meals. From there, we joined hundreds of Orthodox students for a lively Kabbalat Shabbat and Maariv service at the Kimmel Center. As I recognized Jewish students from NYU, Columbia, Cooper Union, YC, and Stern at these services, I tried to maintain composure, knowing that this shul would soon erupt into a roaring social scene. And as soon as tefillah ended (before, also), it did. Adorned in their Shabbat clothing and green wristbands, the army of Orthodox Jews socialized with one another and flooded the streets of NYU, walking toward the Coles Center, where the other "Shabbat for 2000" members awaited them.

That previous week, NYU workers transformed the basketball court into a banquet hall, duct-taping carpet to the wood floor and setting up 180 tables throughout the gym. NYU's Jewish students set the tables and decorated them with various New York-

themed adornments (ours was an "I love New York" sign). Aside from banners of United Athletic Conference sports teams hanging from the walls, as well as a giant scoreboard suspended from the ceiling, the Coles gym looked like a typical dining hall.

My friends and I sat down at our respective tables and met our table captain. To keep to the tight schedule, each of the 180 appointed table captains set their watches to a standard time, and, at 8:15 PM, they quieted their tables. At that time we "gave it up" for the "Streat Beats," a Stomp-based group, which performed an intricate dance in the center of the gym, further garnering everyone's attention before the meal.

Our captain made Kiddush, and we washed netillat yadaam at the table itself, where water bottles and aluminum foil pans had been placed. The menu included baked chicken breast, fried potatoes, seasoned vegetables, and salad—a well-rounded

and tasty meal. As we ate, I looked around the room and noticed the diversity of the "Shabbat for 2000" participants. The religious affiliations ranged from the uninitiated Jew to the Modern Orthodox to the Orthodox Muslim (a few curious burqa-wearing women attended the meal). The scene was remarkable: almost 2000 people, many from radically different backgrounds, coming together for a Shabbat meal.

The rest of the Shabbat included shiurim given by Dr. Lawrence Schiffman and Rabbi Dan Smogel, a delicious home-cooked kiddush at Chabad, lunch at the Coles Center, and a song-filled Seudah Shlishit in the Bronfman Center. Shabbat day was enjoyable and relaxing, but the Friday night meal left the most indelible impression on me from the weekend.

The experience taught me a valuable lesson that specifically applies to YU students. True, officially appointed Shabbat coordinators were glaringly missing from this environment. But motivated students filled those roles instead, planning, organizing, and running every aspect of this unique Shabbat program. With initiative and cooperation, students can create experiences that profoundly enhance our sense of community, belonging, and identity.

RATINGS

Food- 5/5

ACCOMMODATIONS- 3.5/5

RUACH- 4.5/5

GRACIOUSNESS- 4.5/5

OVERALL SCORE- 4.5/5

Weak Side

1. If you're not used to big social scenes, the meals can be overwhelming
2. With so many people, davening and meals can get a bit cramped.
3. Odds are you'll stay with a few guests at someone's apartment, so you'll probably sleep on an air mattress on the floor.

Strong Side

1. If you're cool with big social scenes, then the enormous meals are inspiring.
2. Delicious food at Coles, Chabad, and students' apartments.
3. Meet other Jews, broaden your horizons.



From One Yeshivat Rambam Red Storm Player and Fan to Another

Our team. Our players. Our colors. Our school.

By MOLLIE R. SHARFMAN
(YRHS '06)

"In the final game in Rambam Baltimore history, the Red Storm defeated the Weinbaum Yeshiva Storm 44-31 to capture the Tier III championship title at the 20th annual Yeshiva University's Red Sarachek Tournament" (Zach Weiner, macslive.com)

Only after reading these words did it finally sink in. Only after the final basketball game, did I finally internalize the reality that my home away from home, Yeshivat Rambam High School, was closing at the end of this year.

The Yeshivat Rambam Red Storm Varsity Boys basketball team made us proud at the Yeshiva University (YU) Red Sarachek tourna-

I was representing my school, the school that was mine.

As a sixteen-year-old, I had the privilege to fly down to Miami, Florida with my teammates to represent the Rambam Red Storm in the Ben Lipson Hillel Academy Girls basketball tournament. I knew who I was. I knew where I was going. I was a Yeshivat Rambam student ready to take on the world. Our parents and grandparents came down to Florida and sat on the sidelines in their beach chairs cheering for us. They never missed a game. We walked onto the court representing Baltimore, representing *Torah, Judaism, Religious Zionism, Tikkun Olam* and community service, along with integrity, nobility, leadership, activism and passion—principles that were instilled in us through our

best talent of Yeshiva League basketball from New York and all over the country came together to fight it out. The first year that the Rambam Red Storm Varsity Boys basketball team qualified for this tournament was a big day at Rambam. We all somehow found rides to New York and made our way up I-95 to cheer on our school.

I remember entering the Max Stern Athletics Center at Yeshiva University. I was intimidated and overwhelmed. I had never been to a gym that big before. There were so many people and I had lost the group that I was with. Suddenly I saw the familiar sea of red all the way at end of the gym—the Rambam contingent. I quickly ran over there and stood with Rambam. Our parents, our teachers, and our friends—we all represented Yeshivat Rambam and Baltimore. It was the place where I stood. It was the place where I belonged.

I am a 2006 Yeshivat Rambam of Baltimore High School graduate. It has been almost five years since I graduated but I will wear my Red Storm pin on my bag for as long as I can, as I struggle with the closing of my high school. It is very difficult to sit in classes in my master's program at Yeshiva University pondering the future of Jewish education while the place that imbued me with so much of who I am today falls apart, leaving my thirteen-year-old sister and so many others to search for a new place to stand.

There is much controversy over what happened to Rambam, how it happened, and why it happened.

But there is nothing controversial about basketball.

Last Monday, when the last-ever Rambam Red storm Varsity team won the YU Red Sarachek Tier III championship title, the familiar pride that I felt so many times as a Yeshivat Rambam High School student washed over me once again.

Our team. Our players. Our colors. Our school.

There is just something about basketball that makes things all the more real. Alumni and current players stood together in the

YU Max Stern Athletics Center dreading the end, knowing that it would be the final game. When Rambam won, alumni stormed the court and danced with the last Rambam Red Storm team. Coach Ari Braun then invited alumni and former Red Storm players, among them Moshe Lehman (YRHS '07, YC '13), Chaim Rotenberg (YRHS '06, YC '11), Adam Neuman (YRHS '08, YC '13), Shaya Katz (YRHS '08, YC '13), Alex Porcelain (YRHS '08, SSSB '13), Yisrael Katz (YRHS '08, SSSB '13), Eli Langbaum (YRHS '08, YC '13), Noah Pottash (YRHS '07, SSSB '12) to speak about Yeshivat Rambam and the basketball team, from one Red Storm player to another.

...

Congratulations to our champions: Yoni Finkelstein, Dani Strauss, Ben Teles, Yaron Trink, Noam Sonnenschein, Adam Hariri, Shalom Reches, Oren Hariri, Simcha Rosenbluth, Etan Dinnerman, and

Pinny Margolius. Managers: Jonah Delshad, Shimmy Nabozny, and Ezra Schwartz, and Assistant Coach Shulie Hochman. Thank you for leaving our mark on Sarachek history. And to their humble Coach Ari Braun who so gracefully led them to the championship.

To all those current and former Rambam Red Storm players and diehard fans out there, you know what feeling I am talking about.

Never forget it. Keep it in your hearts and hang up your jersey in your closet and put it on every once in a while.

And as our Yeshivat Rambam High School's tenure in Baltimore comes to a close, the passion and pride of Red Storm Basketball will never die. We are still out there making our school and the Baltimore Jewish community proud—and we always will.

-A member of the Red Storm Family



The Red Storm won the Tier III Sarachek Championship this year.

ment. Led by its dedicated coach, Ari Braun, and assistant coach and former Red Storm star, Shulie Hochman (YRHS '09), they walked into the huge gym at YU with their heads held up high, with pride and dignity, in true Rambam fashion.

I never would have imagined twelve years ago when I played the first Rambam Red Storm Girls Basketball game that the 2011 Rambam Red Storm Boys Varsity team would play the last.

I will never forget walking into my first game. The game was really far away—but when I looked out into the bleachers, I saw our parents, siblings and teachers who all came out to cheer us on. Those same parents and teachers who worked so hard, putting in blood, sweat, and tears to build Yeshivat Rambam from nothing, giving us opportunity after opportunity. Our parents and teachers, who cheered us on at our basketball games, represented dedication. And we always had the best cheering section!

As a twelve-year-old, donning my red Yeshivat Rambam Red Storm Jersey for the first time, I felt a great sense of pride wash over me. I was a part of something important.

education at Yeshivat Rambam.

When Mrs. Sandy Willner and her family created the Yeshivat Rambam Willner Basketball Tournament in memory of their dear husband, father and grandfather, Mr. Gerald Willner, a"n, the greatest Rambam Red Storm fan of them all, they furthered our pride and sense of purpose. They gave us a place to stand. The tournament took place at the JCC, in the heart of the community. We got to decorate the whole gym in red, wear red face paint, and our coveted Rambam Red Storm jerseys. It was something that we could call our own. Assistant Coach Shulie Hochman (YRHS '09) writes about Willner, "running out of the locker room into the gym filled with the whole Rambam family is a feeling no Rambam player can ever forget. Willner represented everything." In February 2011, the Rambam Red Storm won the last Yeshivat Rambam Willner tournament championship—we went out with style and class.

Our team. Our players. Our colors. Our school.

But the biggest highlight of all was the Yeshiva University Red Sarachek Tournament. It was where the

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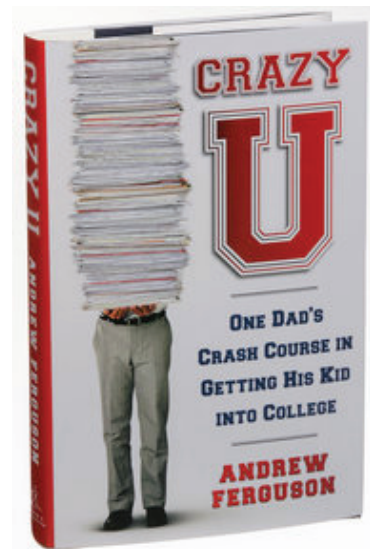
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Book Review: *Crazy U*

By JONATHAN SCHWAB

Crazy U is Andrew Ferguson's year-long record of the trials and tribulations of getting his sometimes-intransigent son into college. Though claiming itself as a memoir, the book really serves as an introduction to the wild world of higher education and specifically the admissions thereto. As one could surmise from the titular adjective, Ferguson hardly composes a paean to this experience, instead choosing to cynically reflect on the madness of a system that has grown to unimaginable proportions. In an



almost-demonizing sidenote, Ferguson notes that higher education, along with only the healthcare industry, has sustained growth during this and other economically troubled times. Ferguson spreads the criticism across a broad swath of absurdly depicted groups: there are interviews with blaring critics of the SAT and "legacy admissions" (accepting children of alumni), but there are also ridicules of the multitudinous books purporting to help those afflicted through the admissions process. The book tells the tale chronologically, following Mr. Ferguson-the-younger's senior year, and picking up topics as he encounters them. Statistical studies, interviews, and the personal experiences of both Fergusons serve to introduce points or drive them home.

The most frequently quoted

statistic in the book illustrates the veritable leviathan that admissions has become: three million students will apply to colleges this year, hundreds of thousands of whom will be going through the mind-and soul-grinding experience of applying to selective schools. It is getting into those schools that preoccupies Ferguson, a self-appointed proxy for his son's anxiety, and this preoccupation leads to the expected cynicism when he discovers that those admissions are hardly a fairly judged process. In one interview, a sardonic ex-admissions counselor scoffs at the suggestion that "fifteen minutes" are spent reading an applicant's materials: "fifteen seconds, he suggests, might be closer to the truth." Admissions statistics lie, says another of Ferguson's endless supply of bled-dry insiders: while a selective school may take ten percent of applicants, probably seven out of those ten spots are going to athletes, legacy students, under-represented minorities, or high SAT scorers to balance out those other low-scoring groups. In reality, Ferguson points out, a student like his son – not an athlete, minority, or legacy student – has a three percent chance of getting into such a school.

The school that the younger Ferguson indeed hopes for (by the book's end, after giving up on dreams for Georgetown, his reach school) is the unidentified Big State University (BSU, in the author's parlance). It is unclear why Ferguson attempts to conceal the actual university, especially when even a cursory level of examination makes it obvious what university his son hopes for – and, to give away the ending, finally attends.

Ferguson's most acerbic comments are reserved for the lucrative industries that have sprung up to feed off the anxieties of both sides in the admissions process. He cannot seem to decide which is worse: the carousel of branding experts, graphic designers, and marketing specialists that endlessly try to reinvent the uniqueness of over 2,000 institutions or the "independent admissions counselors," ranging from

shady internet services that will compose personal statements for all comers willing to fill out a questionnaire and pay a hundred and fifty dollars to a swanky Manhattan firm that charges \$40,000 (yes, you're reading that right) for the "platinum package" which all but guarantees your acceptance to the school of your choice.

Ultimately, though very entertaining and informing (did you know that the SAT was developed from a test that the U.S. Army administered after it drafted 2 million men to serve in World War I?), the book seems to lose itself or its own message. If it is meant to comfort parents like Ferguson, it seems only to stoke their apprehensions further: college tuition per year is currently above fifty percent of a median family income, and if the rates continue as they have, by 2048 tuition even at second-tier universities will be *double* the median family income. Parents will have to work two years for each year their child is in college. Three children currently in first grade and below, says one admissions expert, will cost their parents nearly a million dollars in higher education bills by the time they reach college, sobering stuff for a light-hearted book. Oppositely, if the book is meant to educate readers about higher education admissions, the statistics and perspectives are (and Ferguson acknowledges this on several occasions) shockingly one-sided. Worst of all, there never does seem to be a conclusion as to the relevance of the (in)famed *U.S. News and World Report* rankings: is there value to a seriously flawed system if everyone acknowledges the flaws and yet persists in using the rankings? Maybe I'm reading too much into the book here, but it seems Ferguson is (and this might be sacrilege in America) asking the same question of value of higher education as a whole.

CRAZY U: One Dad's Crash Course in Getting His Kid Into College (By Andrew Ferguson, Simon & Schuster, March 2011. \$25).

'Picasso at the Lapin Agile' YCDS Play Review

By AARON BERKOWITZ

The twentieth century was rife with innovation. The growth of technology and urban dwelling, new schools of art and philosophy bombarding the masses at an unprecedented rate, and of course the advent of Jell-O. *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, the YCDS Spring Comedy Production, tackles these social revolutions by asking one basic question: "What would happen if Picasso and Einstein met?" As astutely pointed out in the program at the show, *Picasso* is a modern take on how history is perceived and shaped by those who make it. It also doesn't hurt that this play was written by the comic genius that is Steve Martin.

Opening in the "Lapin Agile," a bar in Montmartre, Paris that is still in existence today, the audience is introduced to an ensemble of riff-raff characters who kept the laughs coming the entire production. From the bawdy old man, Gaston (played by high-schooler Neta-nel Scwhartz), to the over-the-top star-struck Picasso admirer, Tomas (played by Doni Mandel), each cast member added a smack of flavor and individuality to the play. The quite realistic set, featuring a full bar, a piano, and classic artwork, worked nicely on behalf of Martin's script. This experience was only enhanced by strobe lights, disco balls, and a blaring sound system, all of which provided the perfect backdrop for surprise visits from Elvis (played by Samuel Mirsky) and a certain Charles Dabernow Schmendiman (played by Binyamin Weinrich).

The plot is quite simple in that it is grounded by the limitations of "let's see what can happen in a bar," yet the acting was quite well executed. Each character knew his lines and had an impeccable sense of timing so that there was a

reality to the play accomplished in a very succinct manner (it only ran for about one hour and forty-five minutes).

The action really gets underway when none other than Albert Einstein (played by Noam Weinberger) enters. Espousing his opinion on the nature of the universe, women, and fine wine, the famous physicist turns out to be quite the fun character. The witty dialogue between the characters was further complimented by the skilled use of accents, live music, singing, and impromptu dance performances. The quick jokes were only hindered at times by certain lags in action, which sometimes made the play seem like several smaller comedy bits hitched together by random musical inserts.

The play, however, was not exclusively a comedic entity, also providing a meaningful perspective on what it means to be a person with a revolutionary vision for the future. The play is set in pre-climactic 1904, only two years before Picasso paints his famous "Les demoiselles d'Avignon" and three years before Einstein will publish his groundbreaking *Special Theory of Relativity*.

Tackling questions including who qualifies as an artist, how to ensure one's ideas will survive the test of time, and even ones directed at finding the purpose of love, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* features a blend of wide-ranging cultural references expertly woven together with threads of humor for a historically relevant and most enjoyable production.



Play Review: *Peter and the Starcatcher* How an Orphaned Boy Became Peter Pan

By: JINA DAVIDOVICH

One of the most striking memories of my childhood is when a few of my friends and I would come together, extend our imaginations, and put on a performance for anyone who would watch. Living rooms became magical forests, and couches became boats on an adventure to an island of princes, princesses, and knights. This nostalgia was particularly palpable a number of weeks ago as I sat down to the New York

Theater Workshop's presentation of *Peter and the Starcatcher*. Imagination for the old in age and young at heart is the best selling point of this play, a stage adaptation of Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson's charming children's novel, *Peter and the Starcatchers* (2004). Creator Rick Ellis, co-writer of *Jersey Boys* and *The Addams Family*, and famed directors Roger Rees and Alex Timber, cleverly use script and stage to create a magical place into which any boy or girl, young or old, can get

lost. The genius of this production, however, is that it still has its feet on the ground: throwing in pop-culture references and social commentary elevates this fairy tale to a story that goes beyond the normative boundaries of a production that is fit only for children's entertainment.

Creating the *Wicked* equivalent for Peter Pan, *Peter and the Starcatcher* details the story of how Peter Pan, the amazing boy who never grows up, got his name, fell in love, and started to distrust and

detest grown-ups. Adam Chanler-Beret, who plays Henry in the Tony award and Pulitzer Prize winning production of *Next to Normal*, is Peter – an orphan who begins the play with no name, and no hope. On a boat with two other orphans destined to become servants to a king on a remote island, Peter and his friends are rescued by the play's heroine, a young, thirteen-year-old girl named Molly Aster (Celia Keenan-Bolger). Molly and her father, Lord Aster (Karl Kenzler), are on a mission to

transport a magical substance, "star stuff," to an island where it can be destroyed. Star stuff, whose description is reminiscent of the powerful ring in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series, is a potent substance that transforms its possessor and affords him/her any desire, either for good or for evil. Molly's mission is sidetracked when she confronts the orphan boys, whom she is compelled to save. Particularly in Peter's character – originally lonely,

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dejected, and reserved and ultimately, brave, passionate, and smart - she finds her match. The narrative skillfully undermines stereotypical gender roles by having a girl, Molly, as the “leader” in an otherwise all-male cast. This social commentary, coupled with the tale of young love and the comedic titillation, keeps the audience on the edge of their seats for the entire two and half hour production.

The play’s wit and creativity are surely its hallmarks. Among the most entertaining performances is that of the infamous captain Black Stache (Christian Borle), who combines humor and an unscrupulous nature to portray a villain who is, on the whole, not so villainous, but entirely hysterical. His foil, Peter, is a lonely orphan, whose disgruntled nature is nothing more than a defense mechanism to hide his true wish for a family and a home. Balancing the coming-of-age that Peter undergoes with the unlikely wit and humor of Black Stache’s character, the show leaves the audience with a plot that is endearing, painfully funny, and, despite its over-the-top theatricality and fairy tale nature, extremely relatable.

Although the actors’ performances were, without exception, excellent and enthralling, and the script delightful, the most incredible aspects of this play are its creativity and malleability: the characters are always changing, as is the set. In a production with more than fifty roles, twelve characters shift to accommodate the constantly changing set and fast-paced plot that occurs on two different ships, and then concludes on an island. Although this can, at times, be confusing for the audience who attempts to associate each actor with a specific character, it affords an entirely novel experience at the theater. With nothing more than a rope and a few costumes that seem to be made of what was lying around in the basement, the characters transform the small, simple stage with limited scenery into a world all their own.

This focus on the recognition that theater is nothing more than a number of individuals on a raised platform telling a story, and not merely a representation of real life, forces the audience to reconsider this *avant-garde* theater experience. The excitement of this play stems from the willingness of the characters to tell a story, just like the plays of yore whose stage was a bedroom, dining room, or kitchen. Reminding audience members on both coasts why they fall in love with the tale of Peter Pan time and time again, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, is a thrilling experience for imaginations of all ages.

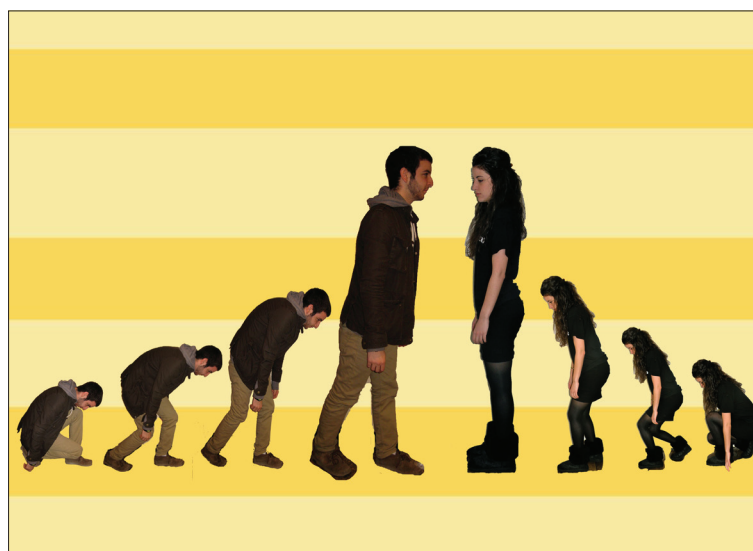
Survival of the *Frummest* Darwinism and Judaism on Dating, Mating and Procreating

BY TALIA KAUFMAN

We Jews are well aware that our decisions are not purely the product of our own desires. Between the demands of our Creator, our Rabbis, our Jewish mothers, our communities and our respective cultures, there is little left for our ids and egos to squabble over. However, even as we are busy following *halakha* and the pack, many are still disillusioned by the fairy tale that we can still follow our hearts. For the great quest for true love remains eternally untainted. We choose our *bashert* based on a beautiful blend of chemistry, meant to be, and lifestyle compatibility. However, modern day scientists have found that our idea of the ideal mate, along with just about everything in our lives, is driven by our subconscious desire for sur-

you don’t believe in evolution, it still shapes your life; in fact, it’s the reason you’re here today. Every living being on the planet—plant, animal, human, *yeshivish*, Modern Orthodox, and non-Jewish—are all products of successful mating. No matter how we feel about Darwin, he makes us look pretty good; from an evolutionary perspective, we are a pretty resilient people. In spite of being the eternal underdogs, with a pretty barren homeland, height limitations, and those pesky *Amalekim*, we are still here, surviving, and yes, procreating.

The science behind mating and attraction is one of the central focuses of evolutionary research. The framework for said research stems out of three overarching hypotheses that make up the Sexual Strategies Theory:



Hey there, sugar. I can walk upright.

vival. This approach, based on the Darwinian methodology, is called evolutionary psychology. Evolutionary psychology is not a specific sub-field of psychology, rather it is one of many biologically informed approaches to the study of human behavior based on a fabulous fusion of evolutionary biology, anthropology, cognitive science, and the neurosciences. The overarching evolutionary hypothesis is that, throughout the ages, we have been driven by natural internal mechanisms—products of natural selection—that have helped our ancestors get around the world, survive and reproduce. We continue to develop these mechanisms and adapt them to our respective environments.

The evolutionary theory has traditionally been exiled from our religion, dismissed as a scientific method of sin. For we chosen people believe to have evolved past the apes, intellectuals, and borderline atheists that make up the scientific community. It is our faith and favoritism with the Lord, we believe, that have ensured our survival all of these years. However, even if

a. Human Mating Is Inherently Strategic

Our subconscious has a whole lot more influence on our animalistic desires than we realize. Every aspect of attraction is subliminally dictated by our drive to find the mate that will best carry on our genes.

b. Mating Strategies are Context-Dependent

That is why those of different eras, countries, and socioeconomic statuses consider different traits to be desirable in a mate. Their desirability is based on what is necessary for survival in their respective societies. For example: many of us of European descent (particularly from third-generation Holocaust survivors) will find our *bubbies* and *zaidies* encouraging heartier eating habits. Because in Europe, food was often scarce and viewed as a luxury, plumper figures were idealized.

Men and women have faced different mating problems throughout history, and as a consequence have evolved gender-specific mating strategies.

Now you can call evolutionary psychologists chauvinists, but you

will have to have to label the majority their subjects the same way, along with just about all of mankind that isn’t dishonest with themselves or an exception to the rule. Evolutionary psychologist David Buss found in a study of 37 different countries that anyone with eyeballs and an average social IQ is well aware already: men are generally more concerned with the levels of attraction to their counterparts, and women with the statuses of their men. However, these seemingly superficial requirements actually have a pretty productive purpose, the continuation of mankind. The qualities that men consider to be beautiful in a woman are actually physical clues to her potential for fertility.

Curvaceous childbearing hips, flowing healthy hair, and clear youthful skin are all signs of a woman’s health and childbearing abilities. Also, a man’s ability to pay for dates at Prime Co., a ring from Tiffany and Co. or earn an Einstein acceptance letter are signals that he will be able to care for and protect his hypothetical future family (*im yirtzeh Hashem* soon by him!). When carefully observed, Darwinism and Judaism are, in fact, a pretty perfect *shidduch*. For evolutionary theorists focus on man’s drive to populate the world, and we Jews are a little bit obsessed with being fruitful and multiplying. In fact, there are many specific Jewances that actually serve as evidence for various evolutionary theories.

What Meidels Want

“Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac,” once gloated the four-eyed, double-chinned politician, Henry Kissinger. The unlikely ladies’ man certainly shows great insight in his observation. Women are traditionally attracted to men with a mature facial structure and an athletic build. These traits are associated with masculinity and the level of protection he will be able to provide for her. However, women are traditionally willing to look past less-than-macho looks if a man’s future is attractive enough. Females are on the hunt for an alpha male. The alpha is defined differently by every species, circle and *hashkafa*. Whether you aspire to build a *bayit ne’eman b’Yisrael* or a *Bayin Ne’iman b’Marcus* we all have our criteria for the nicest Jewish boy based on our own personal backgrounds.

As time evolves, so do our definitions of the alpha. However, the constant among all of these versions of manly men is that they are the leaders of the pack and the most greatly desired by their female equivalents. Through the ages we have made the progression from fawning over brute to brains. In the beginning of time, the big-men-in-caves were the grizliest men who were able to fight off

predators and bring home the beef. In my Library Girl article, I discuss how we Hebrews have changed our types since the biblical days: “At the well, a woman measured a man by his sheep and strength. Now, intellect and ambition are valued.” The way in which we choose to channel our intellect fluctuates with each individual community.

In more right-wing communities, the alpha is often the learner; in modern communities, he tends to be the earner. This does not imply that either community values knowledge or providing for one’s family any more than the other (*chas v’shalomzies!*). Rather it is a manifestation of the differing religious approaches of each community. Inner *yeshivish* circles often follow the traditional mentality that the greatest way a man can provide for his family is by Torah study. Preceding many potential *shidduch* dates, the female will inquire what *shuir* a *bachur* attends, while it seems that the more modern seminaries are not teaching the hierarchy of the YP *shuir* system in night *seder*. The *Torah u’Madda* approach, by definition strongly influenced by Western culture, stresses not only Torah study but mastery of secular knowledge as well. Power is more often also expressed monetarily, for the caring for one’s offspring requires paying for Moshava camps, day schools, Pesach in Miami and all of the brand name trends that the *yeshiva* day school system teaches our *kinderlach* they should be following.

Aidle Ladies

What is the ultimate status symbol for an alpha? A trophy *kallah*, of course. The ability to attract a desirable female is a sign of high mate value and high status. Despite the Stepfordian and anti-feminist connotations that the trophy has developed, her reality remains as real as it was in the days when women were bartered for cattle. In many *yeshivish* circles, thin is the new pretty. A shockingly high number of *yeshivish* ladies feel that, in order to fit the *machmir* mold demanded by their hopeful *shidduchim*, they must fit into a size-zero dooty-length pleated skirt.

Health experts declare that eating disorders are a serious, under-reported disease among Orthodox Jewish women. A Brooklyn study of Ultra-Orthodox and Syrian communities found that one out of 19 girls was diagnosed with an eating disorder — a rate about 50 percent higher than that of the general U.S. population. For arranged marriages among the ultra-Orthodox, the first question matchmakers often ask is about physical appearance, includ-

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Silly Semantics

BY JINA DAVIDOVICH

As an English major, I have been instructed to be very careful about my words. Words carry immense significance and power, whether political, ideological, or religious. What I recently learned, however, is the power of words at Yeshiva University - apparently, we are all about our words. In last week's Town Hall Meeting, the question of Rabbi Ethan Tucker and his infamous off-campus *shiur* was raised yet again. President Joel remarked that he did not take issue with Tucker's coming to speak; however, giving this event

title of "*shiur*," it was permissible. This type of semantic superficiality does not only invade the larger issues in our lives, rather, it filters down into our everyday conversations and exchanges.

Often, when I meet a new person, I am met with three cardinal questions, before I am even asked my name, or how I am doing: *What are you majoring in? Where did you go in Israel? and Where are you from?* It seems that my personal answer: English, MMY, and Los Angeles, immediately delivers all of the pertinent details, and no further information is necessary. I am, un-

at a Shabbat meal in Stern, I was asked about the nature of Modern Orthodoxy: is it not hypocritical for those who call themselves "Modern Orthodox" to live a lifestyle that disregards certain tenants of *Halakha*? Perhaps not everyone feels comfortable labeling him/herself, I responded. *Halakha*, and its place in one's life, is not the same for each Jew. I was then regaled with an Evangelical speech about how each Jew signed a covenant with Hashem at *Har Sinai* to accept what she called "*kolhatorakhula*," the complete Torah in its entirety. We agreed to disagree. I found it odd that she was so concerned with the labels people place on themselves, as opposed to the individual people and their genuine sentiments toward religion. It appears that the legitimacy of a Modern Orthodoxy that differed from what she had been taught was simply illogical in her mind. I ended our conversation by telling her one of my favorite jokes: On the totem pole of religion, everyone below you: not really a Jew. Every above you: cra-azy.

I won't say that labels are not in some way beneficial. Like George Clooney's character says in "*Up in the Air*" "I'm like my mother. I stereotype. It's faster." But are we breeding a culture of individuals who do not read books, but assume that they can glean all the contents from the cover? Interestingly, the externalities that are used to define an individual's character may be rooted in a complex that I like to think of as "*frummer* than thou." The level of one's religious zealotry is often (incorrectly) determined by the type of clothing one wears, the style of *kippah*, how much the length of one's skirt exceeds the *halakhic* requirement, and other similarly erroneous factors. In Talia Kaufman's (SCW '12) 2009 article, "Shtark at Heart: How the Frumshaniasta Goes Searching for Love," which appeared in the "Style" section of the Stern Observer, Kaufman explains the culture at Stern as one whose labeling system works right as you walk through the door: "Welcome to Stern College Orientation: Where there is no need for nametags, for you are categorized with our infamous one-over. Upon arrival to this great institution, students on the Beren Campus divide themselves not by interests or personalities, but by outfits." Although a "Frumshaniasta" may find more *shidduch* dates if she dons an argyle sweater to conceal her elbows, it seems that the source of many of these labels is merely arbitrary.

More than just defining the individual, labels have now been elevated in status to box in not only the individual being labeled, but also the people with whom they consort. A married friend of mine, who is not an alumna of Stern, explained to me how her externalities serve not only to define her own,

but also her husband's religious status. When she and her husband walk into a restaurant or social setting and she is wearing jeans, has her hair uncovered, or simply does not fit in with the general tenets of what one considers a good, old-fashioned, *aidel maidel*, her husband is labeled as well. "Wow, you have really changed since *Yeshiva*," his friends remark to him while giving his wife a judgmental, sideways glance. Because this boy went to a particular school in Israel, it seems that his free will has been stripped away - certainly he will act in accordance with a particular set of rules, because that is what his label suggests.

Undeniably, labels make it easier to assess a situation and navigate certain decisions. However, many times people choose to label themselves because of the ease involved in containing oneself in a certain box or framework. It is significantly easier to be a stereotype, conforming to the realities and mindless nature of certain decisions because they relate to what your label says,

rather than enduring the difficult reality of paving a path toward individuality. In fact, many times a label suggests that all of your thoughts are forwarded to you by someone else - be it a rabbi, a political leader, or any form of social ideology. Is a boy who wears jeans really incapable of learning as much Torah as a boy in black pants? Is a girl who wears sweatpants, and tows around a *gemara*, less interested in *chessed*, *tefillah*, or a real relationship with God? The moment one is able to strip away labels, can we really answer these questions with a "yes"?

So my charge is not to stop labeling, for that would be a waste of space and ink; but rather, a charge to think. Inevitably, labels will remain; we all need to deem ourselves part of one community or another. But in the process of putting on that "Hello my name is" sticker, perhaps fill in the name with something other than "Modern Orthodox," "YU Boy," or "Frummest girl on the block." Maybe, instead, you can fill in, "thinking individual." Silly semantics, real words are for thinkers.



*O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou wearing argyle?
Wait, you're not? Give me back my hand.*

the title of "*shiur*" was inappropriate because the ideological values that Tucker preaches are distinct from those of Yeshiva University. It seems that the President's implication was that if the event were given a different term, such as "lecture," then Tucker would have been welcomed to campus with open arms. There would have been no actual change to the event, but just one word deemed Tucker *treif*. In closing this conversation, the President addressed the *lecture* of Bible scholar, James Kugel, which took place two years ago on the Beren Campus. The "non-existent" Censorship Committee did not bar Kugel, even though his presence was contested by certain students at the University. Because the event was not given the

doubtedly, in the mind of my newly acquired conversation-buddy, tied to every paradigm that these three words evoke: a writer, a "frumMY," and a JAP, respectively. At times, I am even met with a follow-up statement, whose purpose is to confirm my position within the bounds of these stereotypes. "So, you must, like, be a good writer," or "Whoa, MMY - *shtark*." It must be that all that I am is encapsulated within these three questions and their answers. I wonder what would happen, however, if one day I said that I am majoring in Psychology, went to Michlala, and am from Monsey. Would someone lean in a bit closer, and wonder why my aesthetic packaging didn't match my label?

In a recent conversation I had

Survival of the *Frummest*

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ing the woman's weight, and even the weight of her mother. In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolff writes that women often idealize the undernourished body because helps them regress to the dependency of a young child. This form of infantilization is also symbolic of a woman's self-discipline and willingness to sacrifice her own personal needs, desirable traits in many communities.

We all are aware of the extreme focus on *tzniut* in our religion. Often the *aidlest*-looking babes are considered the most desirable ladies. Judaism *certainly* does not have a monopoly on the valuing of purity, as the sources for both the *halachot* and the obsession is deeply rooted in our faith as well as in evolution. Our method of dress has come to identify our religiosity level, and stringency in the laws of *tzniut* have come to signify inner purity. Although this purity is encouraged for both sexes, in our culture today, there seems to be a much greater stress on the innocence of the *maidels*. For example, a ladies' man who flips out in Israel is much more able to gain social *teshuvah* than any of the girls he may have tested his *negiya* with. Buss explains this phenomenon as men's inherent desire for chastity in a mate. In an international sample, two-thirds of men desire chastity in a marriage partner more than women do. Buss gives a second explanation with his paternity confidence theory. Signs of purity are additionally associated with a wife's potential for fidelity. A women can always be sure that her child is hers. A man cannot. Our modern-day perspective on fidelity has not evolved much since our big-

lovin' fore-families. Buss found that among male college students fidelity was found as the most desirable trait (ranks third or fourth in American women).

Dreidel Robbers

Matchmakers should set up men only with women whose ages are "within a year or two of the boy's, or even older," declare 60 American and Israeli *Roshei Yeshiva* in a 2009 letter supporting opening the minds of picky *bachurim*. There is a phenomenon in our community: *bachurim* are looking for *maidels* younger and younger than themselves. That their *kippoa* may conceal their bald spots doesn't make this reality any less creepy or less true. Men in their thirties are looking for ladies fresh out of seminary, leaving a whole generation of suitable *kallas* in *shidduch* crisis. Evolutionary psychologists believe that this age-old issue is the result of man's preference for a mate with a high reproductive value over fertility. Fertility refers to the probability that a woman is currently able to conceive a child while her reproductive value is measured by the extent to which she will be able to contribute to future generations. While a 29-year-old on average is more fertile than a 19-year-old, the 19-year-old has greater reproductive value.

What is the role of evolutionary psychology in the nation of Torah scholars? Is it simply proof of man's sinful natural obsession with *gashmiut*? If we are going to limit ourselves to such a simplistic attitude, than we might as well regress to walking on our knuckles, and ape speech. The purpose of evolutionary psychology is not to denounce our desires for the tall, *shtark* and

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What Are Manners For, Anyway?

A Response to Miss Middot

By YEDIDYA GORSETMAN

In the last issue of *The Commentator*, Talia Kaufman wrote an article entitled “Miss Middot: Manner Up. Don’t Date Down.” Kaufman argues that manners in dating have become neglected among “YUskies and Sternzies,” and as a result, dating has become unnecessarily ugly. As Kaufman puts it, “in the world of dating there is no place for ugliness.”

To resolve this behavioral epidemic, Kaufman finds it important to return to what she sees as the fundamental rules of dating. “Please remember: these rules are not meant to intimidate us,” she writes. “They

were put in place in order to guide us on how to respectfully communicate with our potential mates.” Kaufman proceeds to do an excellent job at highlighting the bad habits that men often fall accustomed to. After all, she warns, “ladies overanalyze just about everything that you say or do.” Consequently, Kaufman is simply trying to help guys out by preparing us with some seemingly basic ground rules.

In the beginning of Kaufman’s piece, it seems that her article is intended for both genders. For example, in “Researching For Love,” her section regarding the beginning of a relationship, she writes, “While a person’s seminary/yeshiva can

certainly tell you something about them, you need to truly get to know them to learn what it actually says.” This seems to apply to both men and women.

Kaufman similarly believes that characteristics such as outward *hashkafa* don’t have to match up perfectly in order to form a relationship. She writes, “I know that I most certainly would not have played *shadchan* with the future Mommy and Daddy Kaufman if I had known them in their Stern/YC years.” Once again, her intended readers seem to be both men and women.

However, in the section entitled “The Mating Call,” Kaufman dis-

cusses the initial conversation over the phone, which she points out should be carried out by the man as soon as possible. Here is where Kaufman seems to shift gears and change from her multi-gendered audience to one exclusively of men. From this point onward, Kaufman lists rules by which men alone must abide. But when the focus turns towards men, it also acquires a negative tint.

When writing about the aforementioned phone conversation, she voices a concern about its going awkwardly and says that the man should “try to charm her a bit over the phone. Worried that an extensive phone conversation will cause

you to run out of things to say on your date? If this is indeed a legitimate fear for you then perhaps try being more interesting.” While a guy should certainly be the one to call, it is definitely not his fault alone if the conversation is uncomfortable. What do you expect? More times than not, the two have never even met before.

Kaufman continues her argument, with apparently no intent to stop her critical tone. When speaking of choosing a location for the date, she writes to men, “You must have a game plan, and you need to use whatever you have, be it money, creativity, or some talent. Have nothing to offer? Then perhaps you should be going to therapy instead of on dates.” While a guy should certainly plan ahead, a common place does not always indicate a lack of imagination and ingenuity. More often than not it may simply be an attempt to take things slowly. And by the way, when did going to therapy become a bad thing?

And just in case you thought that these comments were the end of her crusade, Kaufman backhandedly assures her readers that picking an interesting place to date will not come at the cost of the conversation, for “there I am sure you can talk about how many children you would like to have dirtying up your white *Shabbat* table cloth.” Here she further criticizes men’s lack of creativity by suggesting that they can’t even think of original topics of conversation.

In isolation, each one of these statements seems to be nothing more threatening than some feminist’s light, satirical comments on the simplicity of men. However, collectively these comments form an image of men with the characteristics of uninterested, boring, and therapy-needing *yeshiva* alumni.

In contrast, to describe women she uses adjectives such as “interesting,” “empowered” and “confident.” Women appear ideal in relation to the inadequacy that is man.

Kaufman is doing two things wrong here. First, of course, she is blatantly and unfairly criticizing men.

But second, and more importantly, she is putting the responsibility of the date entirely on the man. And what is man’s responsibility to his superior lady? “To woo her with [his] excessive displays of chivalry.”

The image that Kaufman creates from this dichotomy is one in which man is expected to serve his date while she stands upon her high platforms. Man is expected to fill the role of a servant at the throne of his queen. This inequality is even seen in her complaint of men not walking into the Stern lounge to pick up their dates. “Gentlemen, please man up and *come into the lounge*,” she writes. “We know that Stern dorm lounges are super intimidating, but don’t worry—the security guard[s]...might be a little scary, but they are just being protective of us.” Although it may be true that the security guards are there to protect, the article makes it sound as if these “Sternzies” are some princesses at the top of the Brookdale Tower being protected from invading marauders.

Not only is this image frustratingly condescending toward men, it also is totally counterintuitive to the original thesis of the article. If men and women are not equal, then how can respectful communication ever exist? Respect (to risk sounding like a first-year undergrad) is a type of social contract that is based off of mutual admiration. Thus, without equality, there is no respect, and without respect, ultimately, communication is jeopardized. Therefore, a healthy dating relationship must be founded on equality. Men and women must be on the same playing field, and a man cannot be expected to perform like an entertainer for his date. This would endanger the entire point of the relationship – and *that* would be ugly.

The author would like to recognize that this article was largely inspired by talks with Yoni Mandelbaum.

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handsome or the Hot Mommy Chanas as immoral or archaic. In fact, that is not necessarily in the best interest of our people or even any people. We simply need to bring our subconscious motives to consciousness, and make sure that our genes and our selves are all on the same page. Genes don’t care about human happiness: but humans do. We must make sure that we look for someone that we enjoy passing along our genes with. Additionally, the study of evolution is very much in line with the Semetic tradition of looking to our past, to guide our future. Every adaption found in evolutionary psychology is proof of how far our species has come. It forces us to stop adapting for a moment and ask: how far can we evolve?

Happy Mating!



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