

The Panther Post

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YULA High School

A New Beginning

By Claire Daftari ('28)

As an incoming freshman, it was anxiety provoking to know that I would be in a new school with new teachers, new people, and new surroundings. However, as I drew nearer to the first day, our grade had orientation that made me more excited to start at YULA. At orientation, all of the teachers made me feel so comfortable and welcome, and I met people who had interesting backgrounds. It was really cool to see how everyone came from completely different schools with different academic abilities, but all came together as one. We all shared how we were nervous to start the new chapter of our lives and bonded over what we were nervous about.



Photo: YULA Instagram

Not long after school started, we were off to the freshman retreat. There, we practiced bonding and connecting with peers we wouldn't normally get to talk to and enjoyed ropes courses, archery, the pool, and art. Later that day, we drove to the beach where we had a kumsitz and Rabbi Sufrin provided words of encouragement.

The transition from middle school to high school can be difficult, but YULA made the best effort to ensure we all felt comfortable and that the transition was as smooth as possible. We will continue to adjust and are grateful for new beginnings.



Photo: Natalie Williams/YULA Instagram

When I walked into YULA on the first day, my nerves slowly faded because everyone made me feel so welcome. The students were friendly and inclusive, which helped me feel right at home. The teachers also reassured us by letting us know that they were new to this, too, and we are all in this together. This sense of community and support made the transition much smoother and more enjoyable.

From YULA to Yeshiva

By Dovi Tsarovsky ('26)

Each year, countless yeshiva high school graduates embark on a year of intensive and transformative Torah learning by attending one of the many phenomenal yeshivot in Eretz Yisrael. For an entire year, they are immersed in Torah learning, "yomam v'laila," day and night, deepening their connection to our mesora. This is not just an ordinary gap year, which might simply be pushing off maturity, disregarding the responsibility to build a career, or delaying the inevitable demands of adulthood that await us all. It is very much the opposite. Our alumni seek to ground their futures in a foundation of the wisdom of Torah and there is no better place to learn Torah than in our people's homeland. As the Gemara in Bava Batra 158b notes, even "the air of the Land of Israel makes one wise." But while we all may know this to be true in the abstract, there is no better testimony to this reality than the words of our recent YULA alumni.

"No better place to learn Torah than in our people's homeland"

For last year's YULA graduates, the journey from Los Angeles to yeshiva life in Israel marks not only a physical transition, but also a profound personal one. Adriel Williams ('24), now learning at Yeshivat Reishit, reflected on the transition with a mixture of nostalgia and excitement. "I miss the city in general and my home," he shares with his voice carrying the weight of leaving behind the familiar streets of LA. However, more specifically than Los Angeles, Adriel misses the unique atmosphere of YULA, particularly the "rabbis and the chills." Adriel holds memories of the deep connection with his rabbis and the "chills" at YULA close, a reminder of the tight-knit community he left behind. Those "chills" represent the warmth and comfort of YULA, a bond that continues to shape his perspective even as he steps into new surroundings.



Photo: Natalie Williams

Despite feeling sentimental for home, Adriel is finding his stride in yeshiva, where new experiences and friendships are slowly filling the space once held by familiarity. At Reishit, Adriel has found a new sense of belonging. "I love the kids and the rabbis here," he says, describing the community that has quickly become a second home. For Adriel, one of the highlights of his time in Israel has been exploring the vibrant life of the city. Whether he's walking through the streets of Yerushalayim or venturing out with friends, the energy of Israel has captured his heart in a way that feels both new and somehow so familiar. "Going out and enjoying the city has been incredible," Adriel shares, his excitement for this next chapter in his life clear in every word.

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Connecting Parshat Shoftim to the War in Israel

By Sophia Wizenfeld ('27) and Talya Barz ('27)

In Parshat Shoftim, Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to set up fair court systems. Multiple prohibitions against idol worship are also found in this Parshah. We are also told to listen to the words of our chachamim.

The Torah continues by saying the laws that a king must follow. It next says that because the Levi'im do not get a piece of Eretz Yisrael, there are certain gifts that Bnei Yisrael gives to them.

We are then told to obey prophets and how to tell if a prophet is false.

We are also told to separate Arei Miklat. The Torah then lists the proceedings of going to war.

Parshat Shoftim ends with the Mitzvah of Eglah Arufa.

Parshat Shoftim emphasizes the importance of justice and good govern-

ment, especially telling us to appoint righteous judges and leaders.

The Ramban's commentary on 16:18 reads, "judges and officers you should appoint for yourself for all your gates, which Hashem your G-d gave to you, for your tribes, and they will judge the nation with righteous judgment."

He highlights that we need justice to be the foundation of society, explaining that without justified leaders, even the strongest military might not be able to bring peace or security.

In the context of the current events in Israel, this teaching connects to us powerfully. Doing what's right and being clear about what is morally good is important, not just for winning battles, but also for keeping a sense of fairness and peace in the world.



Photo: Josh Evnin, CC BY-SA 2.0

Tehillim Tuesdays

By Rivky Kaplan ('26)

The Tehillim Tuesdays initiative began because Elisheva Medelowitz ('26) and I felt that while we were reciting Tehillim, we often didn't fully understand its meaning.

"It became overwhelming to be in constant Tehillim chats where messages were flooding in," mentioned Elisheva.

So, we decided to send one Tehillim each week, accompanied by a clear explanation, to make it more manageable.

Recently, we shared a Tehillim with the idea that Hashem is always there for us, even in our hardest times.

He is always willing to listen, as highlighted in the thirteen attributes of Hashem: He is slow to anger and does not punish us harshly, showing mercy instead. Furthermore, He protects us by removing those who wish us harm and is continually looking out for His people.

This concept is both important

and challenging. It is hard to feel that Hashem is always listening, especially when we do not receive the answers we want or expect.

However, we must remind ourselves that Hashem is present and has a plan for us.

We love seeing people take time out of their day to recite the Tehillim chapters we send.

"It is truly an inspiring sight," says Elisheva.

One of our favorite chapters is the one that speaks about the majesty of Hashem's creation, celebrating how beautifully He created the heavens and the earth. It reminds us of our responsibility to praise Hashem for His greatness (cue the beautiful sunsets on the drive home from school), and the wonders of nature around us.

Each moment is a chance to reflect on the beauty and perfection of creation and to express our gratitude for all that we have.

The Panther Post

The Panther Post is the official student newspaper of YULA High School. Its mission is to examine and report news and community events, while also creating an open space for students to express their beliefs. We ensure that articles are written with accuracy, integrity, and respect.



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Summer Movie Review: “It Ends With Us”

By Elisheva Mendelowitz (‘25)

The movie “It Ends With Us” stars Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni. Adapted from the book written by Colleen Hoover, the movie is meant to highlight the importance of stopping domestic violence.

The movie begins with Lily Bloom, played by Lively, living in an abusive household. It later takes viewers through the journey of her adult life and escape from domestic violence in her relationship.

As viewers observe Lily’s struggle, it becomes clear that the title comes from the idea that Lily is done tolerating abuse in her life as she learns to end the generational cycle of violence and protect her children.

After graduating from college, Lily moves out of her hometown to Boston. While there, she attempts to pursue her dream of opening a flower shop. One night, she meets a successful surgeon named Ryle, played by Baldoni. Although strangers, the two opened up to each other and spoke about personal aspects of their lives as if they’d known one another forever.

Without exchanging numbers, they had no way of contacting each other—but fate had other plans. The two are brought together again as Lily’s employee at her flower shop is Ryle’s sister.

Ryle and Lily begin dating. At first, their relationship seems loving and she trusts him, but as time progresses, she realizes she is being mistreated just as her mother had been years before.

Lily was not able to see the signs of domestic violence making a reappearance in her life until it was too late. She deluded herself into thinking Ryle’s actions were accidents until a childhood friend, Atlas, helped her realize the truth. This highlights the importance of having a community and a support system for domestic abuse victims.

Thankfully, around the globe, there are more and more organizations taking shape that aid domestic abuse victims. Even in the Jewish community specifically, there are organizations such as Shalom Task Force whose goal is to “combat and prevent domestic violence and foster healthy and safe relationships and families.”

This movie serves an important purpose by bringing awareness to domestic violence through an appeal to the audience’s emotions. Its engaging content reveals the harsh realities of domestic abuse while not being too bleak. “It Ends With Us” is both educational and enjoyable to watch, despite its heavy subject matter.

Book Review: “Spinning Silver”

By Shayna Rose (‘25)

This summer, I read a book by the Jewish author Naomi Novik titled “Spinning Silver.” Without giving too much away, it is a Rumpelstiltskin reimagining with a Jewish girl (Miriyem), a duke’s daughter (Irina), and a poor farmer (Wanda) in Tsarist Russia.

Miriyem’s family is a traditional Jewish family who are moneylenders for their town. She takes over for her father and gets rich, forcing her to cooperate with Irina and Wanda to get rid of their respective demonic husbands. They all come from completely different backgrounds and come together, but still have to work for their own individual survival.

The attitudes of the characters are very intriguing because they greatly reflect the time period. The families all have their own perspectives on what their daughters should and shouldn’t be. Miriyem views Irina and Wanda as removed from herself and therefore a means to an end, the end being her own survival.

Irina views Miriyem as “a Jew” who is not involved in the world outside the Jewish quarter. Wanda views Miriyem as a person with magical abilities to turn silver into gold, when really she just knows how to do basic math.

One of the biggest moments in the book is at a wedding for Miriyem’s cousin. Wanda and her family attend the wedding and the climax of the book takes place. This entire scene is told from the perspective of Wanda’s brother. He knows nothing about Judaism and has never been to a wedding before, but ends up seeing this all play out in an overwhelming, yet beautiful setting.

Overall, I would 100% recommend reading this book because it gives deeper insight into Jewish life under the tsar from multiple perspectives, without being boring or overly historical. It was a gripping novel that left me smiling by the end of the story.

Food Review: Kosher Trader Joe’s

By Shoshana Helfand (‘26)

It is a constant struggle for Orthodox Jews to find local, affordable, and delicious food. Chains like Trader Joe’s solve this issue and provide a diverse array of kosher snacks. Some classics like pretzels and potato chips are fan favorites. But what Trader Joe’s is known for is putting their own spin on popular snacks like Takis, Fritos, and Oreos—even making them kosher.

First in the review lineup is Trader Joe’s version of Takis, dubbed “rolled corn tortilla chips.” We thoroughly enjoyed the tangy and spicy flavor of these faux-Takis as well as the crunch and affordable price-to-quantity ratio. This snack is perfect for having guests over as they come in a big bag. Raquel Serure, a main member of the “Beauty and the Beast” cast, even described these chips as “the only way I get through rehearsal.” She enjoys the crunch and the munch, she said when interviewed.

Organic Corn Chip Dippers are another fan favorite. Ringing up at \$4.50, this snack is an affordable and delicious treat for hot summer days. According to non-Jewish individuals, they taste just like Fritos. This snack is perfect for a pool party. According to Leah Shaye, a star of YULA’s junior varsity volleyball team, Organic Corn Chip Dippers are her favorite pre-game snack. They energize and satisfy her tastebuds so she can play at the top of her game.

However, Joe-Joe’s were a complete letdown. We were extremely disappointed when we took that first bite of chocolate surrounding cream. It tasted chalky and artificial when compared to the real thing. (Additionally, we were wondering how Trader Joe’s does not get sued for copyright since they seem to stick real Oreos that somehow taste worse into a bag labeled “Joe-Joe’s.” Is Trader Joe’s plagiarizing?) When asked if she enjoyed Joe-Joe’s, Ora Ryzman complained that for the whopping price of seven dollars per box, she felt betrayed by the establishment.

All in all, Trader Joes is truly a hit-or-miss sensation of a grocery store.

Dodgers Win the World Series

By Aviv Weiss (‘28)

The Dodgers have done it: their first full-season World Series title since 1988. Despite going into the postseason with a full starting rotation on the injured list, they gutted through.

Andrew Friedman, the Dodgers’ president of baseball operations, realized at the trade deadline they needed something to put them over the top—even after spending over \$1 billion on free agents, including acquiring Shohei Ohtani. Luckily, Friedman hit the trifecta, trading for Tommy Edman, Jack Flaherty, and Michael Kopech.

Even so, they were a game away from elimination in the National League Divisional Series against the Padres. Yet they managed to shut out the Padres in the last two games to advance to the National League Championship Series.

Against the Mets, they continued their pitching dominance by tying a postseason record of 33 straight innings without giving up a run. Nevertheless, it was their offense that got them through, scoring 46 runs in the 6 game series.

The World Series started out with a bang with Freddie Freeman hitting a walk-off grand slam.

In game two, they rode an amazing seven-inning, one-run start by Yoshinobu Yamamoto to victory with home runs by Edman, Teoscar Hernandez, and Freddie Freeman.

In game three, the Dodgers took care of business as Walker Buehler joined legend Sandy Koufax as the only Dodgers pitcher with multiple scoreless World Series starts.

For game four, Dave Roberts decided to save his best pitchers for the next game so the Yankees scored 11 runs.

During game five, the Dodgers were able to take advantage of three defensive miscues from the Yankees during the fifth inning to score five runs to tie the game. They then used sacrifice flies by Gavin Lux and Mookie Betts in the eighth inning to give them a one run lead that they would not relinquish, going on to win 7-6.

“I’m proud of the perseverance and support the Dodgers have had by the players and the management to overcome past disappointments and bring a championship back to Los Angeles,” proclaimed Ruth Zakowski, a longtime Dodgers fan with grandchildren at YULA.

The Dodgers needed this victory and deserved this parade. These Dodgers were talented. They were gritty. They were battle tested. They were bruised. They are champions.

Israel in the Paris 2024 Olympics

By Eliya Tsfira ('27)

Even with the challenges and negativity they encountered, Israel's athletes made history at the Paris 2024 Olympics. The country won seven medals—one gold, five silver, and one bronze—the most it has ever brought home from the Olympics.

The gold medal was awarded to Tom Reuveny, who competed in men's windsurfing. He brought home Israel's fourth overall gold medal, but its first in the new windsurfing class, iQFOiL. He was coached by Gal Fridman, who won Israel's first gold medal in windsurfing at the Athens 2004 Olympics, 20 years earlier, and also won bronze at the Atlanta 1996 Olympics. This victory felt especially meaningful, not only because Reuveny continued his coach's legacy, but also due to recent events in Israel.

Reuveny expressed, as reported in ESPN, "It's been dark times, and I don't think it could be any better than this, to hear the anthem on top of the podium."

In the silver medal events, Israel continued to dominate in windsurfing as Sharon Kantor took silver in the women's competition. Israel also excelled in gymnastics, winning two silver medals. In men's floor exercise, Artem Dolgopyat won silver, becoming the first Israeli athlete to win medals at two consecutive Olympic Games; he won gold at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, making him Israel's most decorated Olympian. In the women's rhythmic gymnastics group all-around event, Ofir Shaham, Diana Svertsov, Adar Friedmann, Romi Paritzki, and Shani Baknov performed a routine that earned Israel its first medal in this competition. The next two medals were won by two women in Israel's most decorated sport, judo. Inbar Lanir took silver in the under 78 kg weight class, while Raz Hershko won silver

in the over 78 kg weight class. Lanir approached the Games with a broader perspective this year; after October 7, she was frequently seen volunteering and helping out in her community, despite pressure to train in preparation for the fast-approaching Games. She also wore a yellow scrunchie in her hair, a take on the yellow pin typically worn for hostages. For Hershko, this was her second Olympics and her second Olympic medal, after winning bronze at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Expectations were high for her, as she is ranked second in her weight class worldwide, and she lived up to them.

A bronze medal was also won in judo by Peter Paltchik, in the men's under 100 kg weight class. He had extra motivation this year, as his coach, Oren Smadja, made a last-minute decision to come to the Olympics after his son, Sergeant First Class (Res.) Omer Smadja was killed in action in Gaza.

"Oren, after what he went through, I couldn't give up for even one moment," Paltchik said while being interviewed after the games.

The medal he took home meant so much more than just a victory; it shows how both Paltchik and his coach persevered through individual and shared emotional challenges, which motivated them to keep going and win in Omer's honor.

From the beginning of their time in Paris, Israeli Olympians faced hate. As they rode down the Seine, many people were in the stands booing them, but that only empowered them. Through every challenge they faced, their determination was strengthened, uniting them in the process. Every Israeli athlete, whether winning a medal or not, brought pride to the country, and showed Jews all over the world that we can win, no matter how many odds are against us.



Photo: Oded Karni/Olympic Committee of Israel/Fair Use

Trump vs. Harris on U.S.-Israel Policy

By Shoshana Helfand ('26)

Israel has always been a hot topic among presidential candidates and rightfully so. Israel is crucial to America since it is the only democracy in the Middle East. This enables the U.S. to have a base in any future war that may need American intervention. Despite Israel's importance to America, many American government representatives have been opposed to Israel's right to defend itself in light of the Hamas vs. Israel war, like House Republican Representative Thomas Massie of Kentucky, who voted against funding the Iron Dome at a press conference in Washington, D.C. on March 8, 2022. Also, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan voiced her opposition to the funding during a speech on the House floor ahead of the September 2021 vote. "I will not support an effort to enable and support war crimes, human rights abuses and violence," she said, "The Israeli government is an apartheid regime." However, the most pressing incident dispute among American government representatives has been between presidential running mates, Donald Trump and Kamala Harris.

Like most of the Republican party, now president-elect Donald Trump believes that Israel has the right to exist and continues to help protect and advocate for it. One of Trump's most significant moves regarding Israel was his recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017. This move broke U.S. policy that the status of Jerusalem would be left to debate between Israelis and Palestinians, and in 2018, the U.S. embassy was moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In 2020, Trump helped broker the Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and several Arab nations, including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. In 2019, the Trump Administration announced that Israeli settlements in the West Bank were no longer illegal under national law. This controversial move enhanced the lives of Israelis living in the West Bank. Overall, Trump is viewed as one of the most pro-Israel U.S. presidents, who

aligns closely with Israeli conservative policies.

Kamala Harris, in contrast, doesn't give such intense support to Israel. While she supports Israel as a close ally to the U.S., she is also a big supporter of a two-state solution. She criticizes the Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank, viewing it as a barrier to a viable Palestinian state. In December of 2023, Harris went to Dubai to speak with Middle Eastern states about the handling of the Israel and Hamas War. She noted that Israel did have the right to defend itself and that America will not waver in its commitment to bring the hostages home. She made a distinction between Hamas and the Palestinians that Palestinians are innocent while Hamas is the main threat. She says, "Too many Palestinians have been killed." However, some Palestinian citizens are not innocent because they have been hiding hostages in their homes. In addition, the Palestinian people voted Hamas into power and continue to strive for the extinction of Israel.

In conclusion, the differing perspectives of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris on Israel mirror the divide in U.S. politics regarding Middle East policy. Trump's administration took strong steps to solidify U.S. support for Israel by prioritizing Israel's sovereignty and security in the Middle East. In contrast, Kamala Harris, while maintaining support for Israel, cares more about the rights of Palestinians and advocates for a two-state solution.

This nuanced difference reflects the ongoing debate in U.S. politics about how to balance Israel's security with human rights and the pursuit of peace in the region. The varied reactions among American representatives, from opposition to defense funding like the Iron Dome, highlights the complexity of the issue and the challenges faced by U.S. policymakers in navigating the sensitive dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Travel Journal: Student Experience in Israel

By Eden Castel ('26)

Over the summer, many Jewish teens from around the world choose to visit Israel, where they experience religious and personal growth, volunteer, learn, and travel the land. Now more than ever, it is important for Jewish teens to recognize their purpose and what it means to be Jewish in 2024.

I, too, had the incredible opportunity to visit Israel, a place that holds such deep religious and personal significance. I was able to walk around the Shuk and Ben Yehuda, visit the Dead Sea, hike Masada, and snorkel in Eilat. I spent my days doing activities and creating memories that shaped my unique summer experience. I was able to enjoy Israel's beauty and history all while having a great time with my friends.



Photo: Eden Castel ('26)

However, even with all the fun and excitement surrounding summer trips and programming in Israel, there is a constant reminder of the hostages and war. From the moment I arrived, I felt the suffering of the Israeli communities.

From seeing posters being hung on every wall to hearing songs of peace and unity being sung on the streets, I was able to truly feel the pride and dedication of the country. I had the opportunity to hear from a parent who lost a son on October 7th, which was a life-changing experience that helped shift my perspective on life. From these moments I knew I wanted to give back. I'm grateful I was able to do chessed such as having a barbeque for soldiers just returning to their base and running a refugee camp for children.

Traveling to Israel isn't just a trip, it's a connection to our identity as Jewish people and a connection we must continue to protect. Being able to see firsthand the trauma and suffering in our homeland was difficult, but it also inspired me. It helped highlight how strong Am Yisrael is and how special we are. I will never forget my amazing summer experience in Israel and will cherish what I gained forever.

Do you have a meaningful personal story about Israel? Submit it to the newspaper by emailing msteinborn@yula.org – you could be featured in our next issue!



Photo: Eden Castel ('26)

From YULA to Yeshiva, continued from page 1

Similar to Adriel, Jake Lewis ('24) has found deep meaning in his yeshiva experience, where strong connections with rebbeim and new friendships have shaped his journey. Jake, learning at Yeshivat Hakotel, has had a powerful experience, though for him, the separation from family has been the most challenging part of leaving home. "I miss my parents," Jake admits, but his fondness for his time at YULA is just as strong. "All of my rebbeim at YULA have had such a big impact on me, especially Rabbi Sauer and Rabbi Schreiber." These relationships, built over years of learning and guidance, continue to have a profound impact on Jake even as he embarks on his new phase of growth in Israel.

Hakotel, though, has offered Jake an opportunity to form deep and meaningful friendships that he hadn't anticipated. "The guys here are amazing," he explains, beaming with excitement. "Hakotel has the best guys, they're so awesome, and I've made such close friends, even though Yeshiva just started." He describes long conversations and moments of connection with his peers, the kind of friendships that form quickly but last a lifetime. "It's crazy how close you can become with people in just a few days," he reflects.

The learning at Hakotel has also been transformative for Jake. He describes his first night-seder with his new chavrusa as "incredible," a testament to the rigorous and enriching environment of the yeshiva.

But perhaps what Jake loves most about his time in Israel is being "five steps away from the Kotel." Filled with joy and admiration, he explains, "I can literally just look out my window and see the Kotel," his awe still fresh despite the daily view.

Beyond the view, it's the ability to step out and immerse himself in the ancient streets of Yerushalayim that brings him the most joy: "Walking around the Old City is surreal, it's definitely one of the best parts about being in Yerushalayim." The blend of Torah learning and unique atmosphere of the Old City deepens Jake's connection to Israel, making his time in Yerushalayim truly inspiring and transformative.

Aharon Topp ('24), who is now learning at Yeshivat Sha'alvim, reflects on his time in Los Angeles with a sense of fondness: "In LA, I really miss all the amazing restaurants on Pico, hanging out with friends, the weather, and of course the great community." He paints a picture of the familiar comforts that shaped his daily life. Aharon also emphasized that what he misses most about YULA is the rebbeim: "I am so lucky to have built such meaningful connections with them," Aharon says, highlighting the deep admiration he holds for their Torah learning and middot. The bond he created with his rebbeim has left a lasting impact, and while he's sad not to see them every day, he feels fortunate to have established such a strong keshet with each of them.

For Aharon, the best part of Yeshiva has been the ability to immerse himself in his learning. "I feel like I grow so much in my learning when I'm able to learn uninterrupted, and Sha'alvim has given me an incredible opportunity to do so," he explains; this focused environment has been transformative for his growth. But it's not just the learning that resonates with him; being in Israel itself holds a special meaning. He shares, "The best part about being in Israel is that I am in an environment where I feel most at home." His connection to the land and the opportunity to visit places rich in personal and religious significance have deepened his sense of belonging, making his yeshiva experience even more meaningful.

For these YULA graduates, the journey to yeshiva in Israel has been more than just a change in location. It is a transformative chapter that blends deep personal and spiritual growth. Though they each miss the comforts of Los Angeles, their friends, and the beloved rebbeim who shaped their time at YULA, their new connections, outstanding learning, and the profound environment of Israel have filled their lives with infinitely more meaning. As they walk through ancient streets, form lasting bonds, and immerse themselves in Torah, they are building foundations that will not only define their yeshiva years, but shape the rest of their lives, guiding their future paths with newfound strength and purpose.

Students' Thoughts on the New Shade Structure

By Eliya Tsfira ('26) and Maya Banafsheha ('27)

Over the summer, a new shade structure was added to the Horowitz Plaza. Despite students' initial concerns that they would not be able to warm up in the sun, the structure has proven beneficial in light of recent heat waves.



Photo: Maya Steinborn

Yakira Kupperman ('28) comments, "It's perfect for not getting burnt."

Similarly, Maya Jacobs ('27) says, "I like it when I have a free [period] because it helps me get fresh air while I study, and it's nice and shady."

While it didn't seem the most convenient at the start, the shade structure is a great place to sit, study, relax, and eat lunch. Sometimes teachers will even teach their classes under the structure. It offers everyone a space, whether they prefer the sun or the shade.

Ultimately, the shade structure has brought comfort to YULA, allowing us the flexibility to choose our preferred environment. We are grateful for this new addition and the ease and flexibility it has brought to campus.



Photo: Maya Steinborn

The New Roles of Ms. Benhamou and Ms. Shandalov

By Leah Shaye ('26) and Dovi Tsarovsky ('26)

This year, Ms. Yehudis Benhamou and Ms. Rachel Shandalov have taken on new roles at YULA High School.

Ms. Benhamou is now the Interim Principal of General Studies at the Boys Division, overseeing all General Studies classes and teachers, while continuing her role as the Principal of General Studies at the Girls Division.

Ms. Shandalov is now the Assistant Principal and Director of College Guidance at both divisions, where she works closely with students to ensure they feel happy in their classes, grapple with academic challenges, and achieve their educational goals—ultimately helping them find the best college fit.

Ms. Benhamou and Ms. Shandalov are both excited to build new relationships with teachers and students while making sure to balance their time evenly between both schools.

These new roles have brought significant changes to the YULA Boys Division—primarily, fostering more consistency and efficiency in the academic and college guidance processes.

More specifically, Ms. Benhamou is leading the charge to align General Studies policies and coursework across both campuses.

Eager about the change, Aryeh Hofer ('26) said, "Ms. Benhamou was an incredible AP Euro teacher and she is now using her organization skills to help us with our classes and scheduling."

About Ms. Shandalov, Aryeh shared, "She has already educated me and other juniors about the college application process and offered meetings to discuss the correct path."

Overseeing a larger pool of students equips Ms. Benhamou and Ms. Shandalov with broader insights that can enhance decision-making for the benefit of all students across both campuses. With this approach, both campuses can utilize the expertise that they bring.

Welcoming New Staff

By Raquel Serure ('26)

Returning students and teachers are very eager to welcome new staff for the 2024-2025 school year.

Five remarkable teachers are joining the Judaic studies team. In addition to assisting with student life for 10th grade, UCLA graduate Ms. Yaelle Shaye will teach Jewish history. Mrs. Hayah Sedighpour has a BA in psychology and a master's in Jewish education; she is excited to be a 10th-grade mechanechet as well as a machshava, Pirkei Avot, and halacha teacher. Dr. Shoshana Steinmetz has a bachelor's degree in Judaic studies and biology, plus a PharmD, and will be teaching Navi. Joining us from YULA—Boys Division is Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom, who will teach Talmud. Rabbi Morris Israel, who has a master's in education, is looking forward to his 9th grade Jewish history and Talmud classes.

We also have amazing new general studies additions. The history department will be bolstered by Ms. Nicola Bella, who has a bachelor's in history, and Mr. Nathan Rivas, who will also teach English.

Joining the math department is Dr. Nnamdi Okeke, a Yale graduate with a medical degree who is also teaching at YULA—Boys Division. Dr. Okeke commented on his YULA experience in the first few weeks of school, saying, "From the very beginning, I've been welcomed by a remarkably supportive and passionate staff and administration, all dedicated to creating an inspiring learning environment." He continued, "It's been a joy to be part of a school where the enthusiasm for learning is contagious, and I look forward to what the rest of the year holds!"

Mr. Zach Wilson, the newest addition to the science department, similarly comments, "The atmosphere here has been quite pleasant, full of energy, and full of life. I've really enjoyed my time so far." He holds a bachelor's degree in biochemistry.

Our new STEAM Director, Ms. Garnet Clarke, has a background in web development and was trained in both the U.S. and Israel at STEAM-based companies. Lastly, the new PE coach Ms. Natasha Rouchon has a master's degree in dietetics and nutrition and is very passionate about health and wellness.

No Phones, No Nonsense

By Eden Castel ('26)

As we began this school year, something was different on the YULA campus. Students returned for a new year, but cell phones did not. The typical buzz of texts, notifications, and food delivery alerts disappeared.

This quiet is due to YULA's new phone policy, which means no phones between classes and lunch, a big shift from previous years.

With this new change, students learn how to get around without checking their schedules on their phones and texting friends between classes. While the policy initially opened up some concerns, it has quickly led to a positive transformation on campus.

The impact of this new policy has been felt across campus as students are now navigating their day without phones in hand. This has led to some surprising benefits.

Rabbi Sufrin shared, "Since implementing no cell phones on campus, we've seen a remarkable increase in student engagement and focus, with many students themselves acknowledging the positive shift in their learning environment."

Many students agree that not having their phones has allowed them to engage more with their surroundings. Additionally, teachers and faculty have noticed a shift in focus and energy in class. Now, less class time is spent waiting for phones to be put away, and occasionally even having notifications disturb class.

Ms. Steinborn, like Rabbi Sufrin, shared, "Students are more fully immersed in their academic growth in the classroom and are livelier with their peers in the courtyard." She continued, "With our cellphones tucked away in the office, school gets to be more of what it is meant to be: a community of learners who are present with and for each other. We are a little more free from the anxiety-inducing pressure to respond to social media right away or send a text back right now."

By going through a full day at school without phones, those hours are dedicated to learning and being with friends in the moment, rather than focused on distractions.

However, this change goes even beyond the classroom. Like Ms. Steinborn observed, during lunch, more and more students talk with one another rather than scroll, pushing students to leave their comfort zones without their phones.

In past years, many students relied on their phones to keep track of their class schedule, but without that ease, students are now forced to memorize their schedule, leading them to be more conscious and present, which can be seen as a positive change. As we continue this school year, we hope to see even more positive changes due to the new phone policy to create a more engaged, focused, and present YULA.

Students on the 2024 Presidential Election

By Mira Schulman ('26)

Of the 47 students that responded to Panther Post's October presidential election survey, 97.9% said that they are voting for former president Donald Trump or would if they were eligible to vote.

"Make America Great Again ASAPPPPP," wrote sophomore Talya Ferszt, quoting Trump's presidential motto.

The survey was open from Oct. 29-31, and asked for participants to state their choice of candidate and (optional) explain their reasoning. Though there were spaces to leave their name, grade, and number, most students chose to remain anonymous.

Of the 46 respondents who chose Trump, of which only three did not give any explanation, 24 stated Israel as their primary reason.

"He really has Israel's best interest[s] in mind, and that's the most important for me," said freshman Avigail More.

"Trump will help Israel so much," concurred junior Batsheva Scheinfeld.

Many respondents praised Trump and questioned anyone who did not plan on voting for him.

Wrote one anonymous respondent, "GO MAGA! I LOVE TRUMP! Anyone who votes Kamala needs to rethink it. Fr [for real], why is she even running?"

Others averred that Harris voters only chose her because of her gender and/or race.

"Most people voting for her are only because she's a [woman...] and not Trump," said freshman Talya Barz.

Many respondents also approved of Trump's fiscal policies, citing rising inflation over the past four years as proof of President Biden's (and, therefore, Vice President Harris's) economic shortcomings.

"Because just thinking about our economy alone from the last four years and the previous four years are drastic differences," said one anonymous respondent, "and that's because Trump was the president. Why should we change that and try someone new when we know Trump is the best candidate."

Similarly, an anonymous sophomore prefers Trump because "I want inflation to go down."

Those who specifically criticized Harris claimed that she was unable to speak for herself, take a strong stance on important issues, or differentiate herself from Biden. Others said that she was a liar and an alcoholic, and will be bad for the Jews.

Some students were unsure why they preferred Trump, or said that it was because their parents wanted them to.

"I believe he supports Israel and my parents would disown me if I didn't," said a student who preferred to remain anonymous.

Others alluded to generally positive feelings about Trump's 2016-2020 presidency.

"I think the country was better and everything was less chaotic when he was [president]," wrote another anonymous respondent.

There was only one response in favor of Harris on the form. It was anonymous.

"I need to be able to tell my granddaughter that I voted for the first female president," the student wrote. "I could also never vote for someone that reminds me of an abusive father and husband that my family knew."

On Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 5., YULA Girls (specifically, juniors Sophia Daftari, Ella Gabbaypour, Elisheva Mendelowitz, and history teacher Mr. Simon) sent out a voting form to all grades, for students to select their preferred candidate. Of the 160 students who voted, 154 selected Trump and 6 selected Kamala.

Editor's Note: In the national election, of the 245 million Americans eligible to vote according to the University of Florida Election Lab, more than 150 million voted, with 50% voting for now president-elect Trump and 48.3% voting for Harris.



Comic: Chaya Kohanbash ('26)



Photo: Mira Schulman ('26)

Connections

By Leah Shaye ('26), Eden Castel ('26), and Rivky Kaplan ('26)

CHAIR	VALEDICTORIAN	SUSHI	CHINESE
SEATING	FOOD	FRESH	ISRAELI
WHATSAPP	POSTMATES	BURGER	PARKING
ICE CREAM	TEXTING	FRUIT	SCHEDULE

MAN
CHAIR, FRESH, FRUIT, ICE CREAM

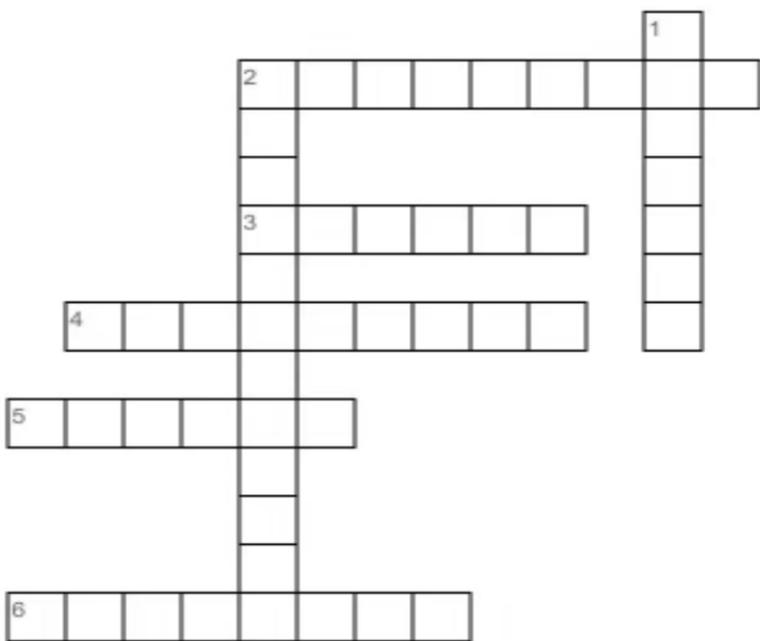
THINGS YOU FIGHT FOR AT YULA
FOOD, PARKING, SEATING, VALEDICTORIAN

NEW LUNCH MENU
BURGER, CHINESE, ISRAELI, SUSHI

WHAT YOU MISS WITHOUT YOUR PHONE
POSTMATES, SCHEDULE, TEXTING, WHATSAPP

Crossword

By Meital Steinlauf ('26) and Judah Shadpour ('26)



Across:

- Number of girls in the freshman class
- Number of new hires at the Girls Division
- Number of years since YULA was established
- What did not return to YULA this year
- Number of new hires at the Boys Division

Down:

- This year's school theme
- Number of boys in the freshman class

Strands

By Raquel Serure ('26) and Sophia Daftari ('26)

Theme: FALLING BACK INTO SCHOOL

I P S R E I
C E D U D C
A U T F M N
P Y A A C O
I Z L E R N
E C O M U P
R S E W P K
E T A S N I