



# BRAINSTORM

*It's Time To Hear What's On Your Mind*

## Letter from the Editor

*"The Best of Times"*

SHALVA GINSPARG ('11)

Dear Reader,  
Perhaps you too have noticed the strange union of opposites come September. The tanned skin and stark white loose-leaf paper, the long faces and perky, highlighter-pink folders, an earnestness to embrace the future and a stubbornness to hold on to summer. It's back to school

season: "the best of times, the worst of times." On one hand, fresh goals exist, and on the other, worn ambitions, bad habits, and floundering resolve. Behold, my color-coordinated backpack that dissolves without fail into a chaotic mess three months into the school year. And perhaps what chips away most at the

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## Standing up to S.T.A.N.D. U.P.

*The Implications of Teenage Driving*

JACOB LEVENSON ('11)

Brace yourself for a shocking statistic: "Last year, nearly 5,000 teens died in car crashes—making it safer for a teen to be in a war zone than on a highway." In order to prevent a similar advertisement from being posted by Allstate next year, the car insurance company is endorsing the STANDUP Act of 2009, a proposed federal law which would increase the required hours for pre-license training and limit in-car disturbances, nighttime driving, and the number of friends allowed in the car with teen drivers. Advocates of the STANDUP Act optimistically assert that the new law will reduce the number of fatal car accidents among 16 year old drivers by an astonishing 40 percent. Standup Act supporters further contend that if the Standup Act will be buried, so will 5,000 more teenage drivers this year!

Although the STANDUP Act appears to be a no-brainer, the new law would have several sig-

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Support the  
**STANDUP Act**  
and help stop  
teen driving deaths.

[ACT NOW](#)

# EDITORS LETTER

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vener of novelty is the nagging sense that the new quickly gets old, that resolutions quickly unravel.

In deed, the burden of the teenager going back to school mirrors the burden of the writer: the latter must fill a blank page with worth, the former a blank year. Both wield the power to create new realities. And of course, the actions and decisions of high-schoolers write a story about the people they are, and the people they hope to become.

How fitting then that the first Brainstorm of the new school year celebrates "Back to School." With its "teenage-centric" theme, our newspaper tackles head-first the real issues that face real teens. In our cover article, "Should We Stand Up to the STANDUP Act?" we explore the dangers of teen driving, especially relevant as students drive carpools to and from school each day. We address dress codes in "You are What You Wear Or Not?" and bad behavior in "The Death of Middot in the Gilded Age."



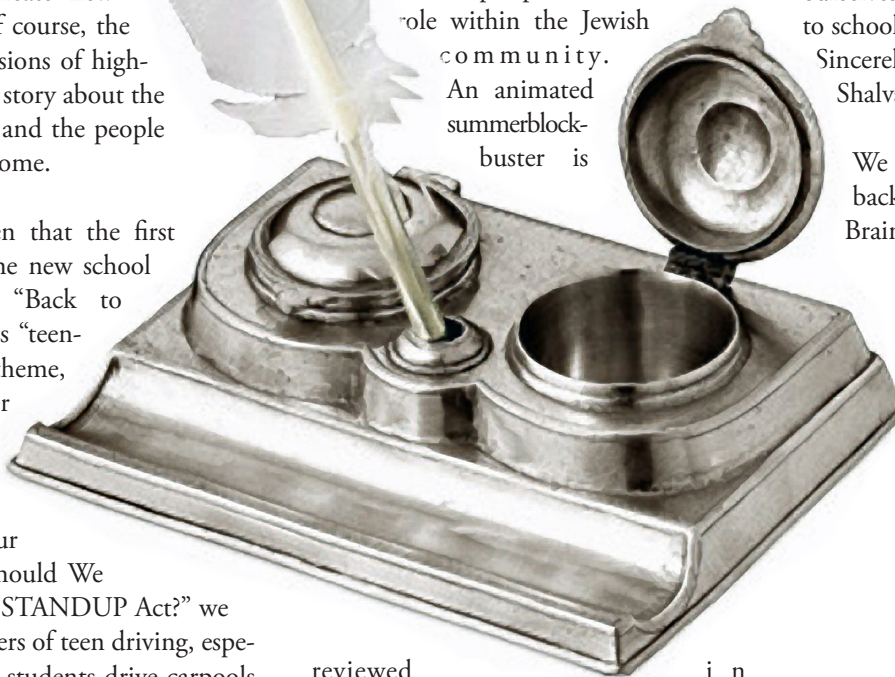
Summer is spotlighted in "How I Spent My Summer" as three writers share remarkable summer experiences. Back to school equals the return of homework—much of which requires the computer. "Internet Unmasked" confronts the Internet and different perspectives on its role within the Jewish community. An animated summerblockbuster is

brought to court in "Lebron James: The View from South Florida?" and "The Infinite Lives of Brett Favre" analyzes Favre's most recent return from retirement. And finally, our writers turn their attention to the Congressional elections, debating whether the Republicans represent the "Government of the People" or do not deserve the "Keys Back."

This publication was made possible by the dedication and skill of the Brainstorm writing, editing, and technical staff. Much gratitude is also owed to Rabbi Allen Houben and Mrs. Claudia Cohen, whose guidance has been invaluable. The Brainstorm honors the powerful medium that is the written word. We hope to provoke dialogue about real issues and maybe learn something new ourselves in the process. Welcome back to school—Brainstorm style.

Sincerely,  
Shalva

We genuinely welcome your feedback, please e-mail us at [WYHS-Brainstorm@aol.com](mailto:WYHS-Brainstorm@aol.com)



reviewed in "Toy Story 1 vs. Toy Story 3: Who's Got the Play Date with Destiny?" as is Kathryn Stockett's debut novel "The Help." Lebron James is



FASHION

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**BRAINSTORM**

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*The Designer Wears Prada*

*My Foray into the Fashion Industry*

BY RACHELI MIZRACHI ('11)

Day 1: I'm sitting in a cab in New York City on my way to the West Village. As is typical in the fashion world, I have no clue as to what I'll be doing until I meet my boss. Let's call her, She. All I do know is that I've flown to New York to be She's assistant for a few days and that my assignment pertains to a new store that She is planning on opening in the Lower East Side, which, in her words, is the new "It Place" for the urban young fashion lovers of New York. I'm here. As I step into the high fashion clothing store, I forget about the past or future, I am in the present. This present state is one where just beautiful things exists; it's my fantasy world.

You must understand, I may deem the clothing beautiful, but I'm not so sure you would all agree with my perception. In a way, one of

**"As I meet the client, two young fashion employees walk in."**

the reasons I came to work in fashion for even just that one week was so that I could be around people who think like me and perceive this world as I do—with lots of creativity.

I finally discover the task at hand. The client hired She to transform her small yet endearing store into a successful and high-fashion business. As I meet the client, two young fashion employees walk in. Because the store is so small, they feel the need to introduce themselves.

Ambitious Fashion Employee #1: "Hi. My name is (such and such) ... and I

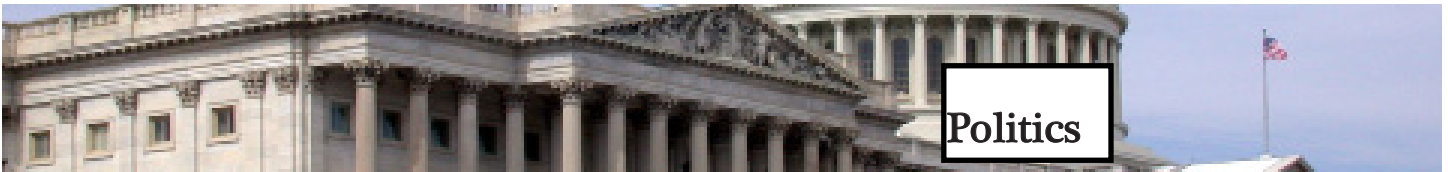
work for (insert name-dropping) ..." I am beginning to notice that those working in the fashion world are sometimes more consumed with who



they worked for rather than what they created or contributed to fashion. Despite this irksome observation, I was enjoying myself—still immersed in my fantasy world.

Day 2: Today, I really meet New York City. As I await the text from my boss, (she has yet to inform me where I will be going today), I begin to wonder whether I wore the correct outfit. You see, New York City consists of many different areas; each area is characterized by a different sort of style. The previous day I was in the Lower East Side which consists of a more urban population. Sadly, I wore a more sophisticated Upper East Side outfit, when I should have been wearing something "cooler." So this morning I decided that I should put the more urbane kind of outfit on. Ironically, I stayed in the Upper East Side, where sophistication was the name of the game

On Day 2, I simply run errands. These errands allow me to gain better insight in to the fabric of New York. I notice  
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Politics

# Don't Give Them Back the Keys

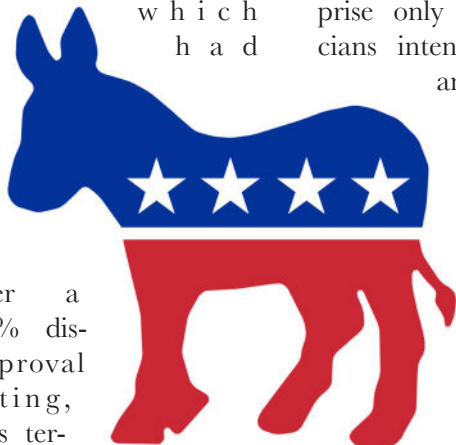
BY ARIE HIZKIYA ('11)

If the U.S. Congress can be compared to a raucous, bumpy car-ride, then I have one message regarding the Republicans in the backseat: don't give them the keys back. Despite major obstacles, the Democrats have made great strides in the past two years. It is time to continue pressing forward! Changing drivers could destroy any progress America has made.

The most prevalent criticism of the Democrats in today's political landscape is two-fold: they are responsible for the myriad of social, political, and economic issues plaguing our country and they have done nothing to solve these problems. I beg to differ. The combat phase of Operation Iraqi

Freedom, which had

over a 75% disapproval rating, was ter-



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minated by the Democrats. Congress also passed a bill that protected those in trouble with their mortgages as well as a second bill which provided tax refunds to people who bought new homes. These measures have increased the public's confidence in the market. Furthermore, the economic stimulus bill preserved and created jobs in a declining economy.

A campaign that focuses only on the laws it hopes to repeal is not a productive one. America has a proud history, dating back to the first transition of power from Federalist to Anti-Federalist, of building off of previous administrations' work and moving forward. Yet the vast majority of Republican platforms thus far comprise only what politicians intend to repeal and not what they intend to create.

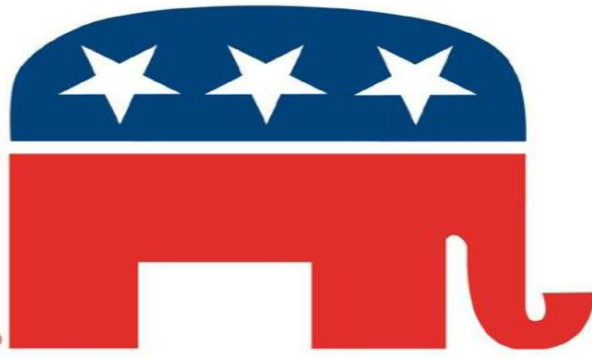
America needs Congressmen who are willing to be bipartisan and

# Government Of the People

EZRA KURTZ ('12)

For the first time in almost twenty years, the past presidential election handed the Democratic Party control of the Oval Office, the House,

that they hoped to end the practice of adding small projects into bills in order to pander to voters. However, the record shows that Democrats have been allowing Congress



and the Senate. With this vast power in their hands, the Democrats promised to finally help America emerge from its recession and trim its odious deficit. Yet two years after their triumph, the federal deficit has more than tripled due to reckless governmental spending. Moreover, unemployment has risen almost two percent since President Obama took office, despite several multi-billion dollar bailouts of big corporations. The situation is growing dire, and Americans have come to the realization that irresponsible spending by established officials is crippling our great nation.

When Democrats last retook Congress, they promised to put an end to earmarks in bills. What this means is

to pass thousand-page bills, often loaded with pork barrel spending. In fact, the recent Fiscal Year 2010 Defense Authorization Bill had more than 1,700 different earmarks attached to it. America can hardly pay to appease special interests at the expense of its citizens, and the GOP will put an end to this irresponsible behavior if given control of Congress.

Moreover, in order to curtail rampant spending, the GOP will repeal Health Care Reform Bill that passed through the House. In turn, the Republicans would look to replace it with their own health care bill which, unlike the Health Care Reform Bill, would add a total of zero taxes. This will certainly prove

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# Lebron James:

*The View from South Florida*

BY ELLIOT DANIS AND AYELET PETROVER ('12)

On July 8th, 2010, the world stopped and watched the 6'8," 250 pound star athlete announce a decision that would rock the basketball world. It was a warm summer night when parties went unattended, grooms were deemed absent at their own weddings, and offices emptied as the nation united in front of the TV to hear those infamous words that had been anticipated for months. "I'm bringing my talents to South Beach," the superstar announced on the nationally televised ESPN special "The Decision." Though said so casually, those seven innocent words caused unimaginable chaos throughout America, and the man behind the mayhem was none other than our starting Miami Heat forward, LeBron James. The world labeled his decision "weak" and "cowardly," while South Florida celebrated in the background. Many see LeBron's desire for such great attention and failure to thank his former team as quite disrespectful and arrogant.

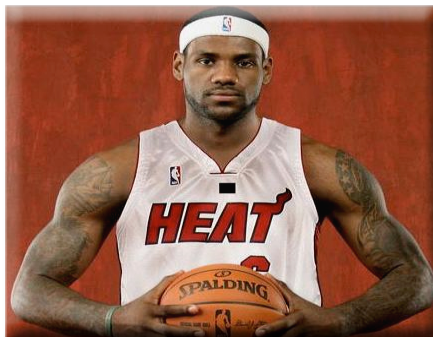
Honestly, who could possibly find leaving a sub-par team to join a future basketball dynasty alongside Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh to be a heart-wrenching decision? Was James' decision desperate and cowardly, one that will jeopardize his potential

to be the greatest ever? To insist that James' decision was wrong is unfair. Though the world expected him to win, he has never won a championship in Cleveland and was tired of losing, likely due to a lack of team support. The most notable NBA careers are not judged by how many slam-dunks

**"Lebron James chose to join the Heat because he knew he had to win"**

players viciously throw down in front an exuberant crowd of 80,000. The great ones are not remembered for the points they scored or their behind the back passes. Rather, the game's elite are given the highest praise based on how frequently they win. The titles the champions attained earned them their spots in the hearts and souls of sports fans worldwide. LeBron James chose to join the Heat because he knew he had to win and staying in his hometown wasn't getting him there.

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## THE INFINITE LIVES OF BRETTE FARVE

BY JAKE SIEGEL ('12)

Once again, quarterback Brett Favre is back for just one more season of professional football. That is, at least for now. Favre has already retired with the Green Bay Packers and the New York Jets. This time, however, his decision to play came right before the start of the season. Entering the 2010 season, Favre's status was still hazy as he had yet to make his decision. Players and personnel alike are mad at Favre for retiring again just so he can "unretire." Several players have frowned upon Favre's decision to come

back for another season, as Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver Chad Ochocinco criticized Favre's drama



and wondered why he and Terrell Owens don't receive the same fawning treatment from the media.

The Vikings practically begged Favre to come back, sending placekicker Ryan Longwell, defensive end Jared Allen, and offensive guard Steve Hutchinson to Favre's house in Mississippi to plead with him to return.

To start the NFL season, the Vikings played the Saints in the New Orleans Superdome, just about the toughest place to win on the road. Favre's offensive lead was mediocre, completing 15

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# THE INTERNET UNMASKED

BY SIMCHA ADELMAN ('12)

In our grandparents' generation it was the radio, in our parents' the television set. And in ours, for better or for worse, it is the Internet. It seems every generation ushers in a single, ground-breaking technological development that, when not facilitating tremendous good, threatens to tear our social fabric at the seams. The Internet is no exception. In today's world it has become a virtual necessity—a social



networking device, a library, a news source, and most importantly, a mode of communicating and making a living. The potency of the Internet, however, has made it the object of much *halachic* and religious discourse, as today's Jewish authorities seek to determine

the appropriate role of this important yet dangerous device in the larger context of Jewish life. Current approaches to the Internet run the gamut; some communities cautiously deem it a hazardous albeit indispensable tool, others ban it outright. All responses however testify to the compelling question raised by the Internet: can we embrace progress and technological advancements without compromising our long-standing traditions and ideals?

As much as the Internet enables Torah learning and *kiruv* it also places an enormity of inappropriate content at the fingertips, or keyboards rather, of Internet users. To quote a Modiya article, "in the late 1990s, when the World Wide Web was exploding with new websites, a brief, informational site on Satmar Hasidism, apparently published by an independent-minded Satmarer, issued a warning in Yiddish at the top of its home page which said, 'if you can read this, you should not be using the internet. It is *muktza*.' The author further contends that, "though the site has since been removed, its warning is emblematic of the official Haredi attitude toward the internet, essentially that it is not a place for Torah-true Jews." The Novominsker Rav, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow (Shlita) echoed this sentiment in an address on September 21st, 2003, when he declared that "the internet, with the flick of a button, invades a Jewish home, a Jewish soul, and makes moral disaster." The Rav ultimately encourages "Jews that are

committed to lead Torah lives" to "keep out the Elohim Acherim (alien influences)." These excerpts from the Rav's lecture were featured in the November 2003 issue of the *ewish Observer* which confronts the dangers of the Internet. In "Staying away from the Cyber-Slums," an article in the issue by Rabbi Leib Kelemen, the author declares that "we will survive the era of the Internet by clinging to Daas Torah" and that "our Gedolim have advised us to remove Internet from our homes, and so we will do." However, despite the warnings of Daas Torah, Internet usage is still prevalent in the Jewish Community. According to Rabbi Norman Lowenthal, Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim Talmudical Academy's general studies principal, a survey of students in Yeshiva, Bais Yaakov, and Day Schools indicated that "55 – 95% have unsupervised internet access" and "49 – 68% have seen inappropriate material online."

Though the perniciousness of the Internet is acknowledged by virtually everyone, some feel that to totally ban Internet from Jewish communities is to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Instead, members of this second camp suggest that Internet use be regulated and monitored—not eliminated. Indeed, in some households, the Internet is only permitted to be used as a way of making money and spreading Judaism. Some communities designate certain individuals who are allowed to use the Internet, though never for casual use. Other communities allow Internet use provided that the person using it is in a public place such as the living room or a library. Rabbi Lowenthal suggests that Internet use can be made "safer" via the implementation

**"Survey Says:  
49-68% of  
students have  
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of filtering programs in "YeshivaNet," and possible programs in The Jewish is responsibly ac- taking steps towards this wide-spread is- Internet, like any other device, can be used for good or evil. Regardless of the application, however, "if there is any one single area" notes the Novominsker Rav "that needs *tikkun*—control, improvement, and yes, change—in our *tzibur* (congregation) it is the it is the pervasive disease known as the Internet."

of filtering grams. Posclude "Jnet," "SafeEyes." community knowledging ternet and rectifying sue. The



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In response to the decision that gave us the “Three Amigos” of South Beach, Cleveland’s owner Daniel Gilbert issued an outraged open letter to Cavalier fans. Gilbert insisted that LeBron had been a major letdown and set a poor example for children in Cleveland. He also wrote that the Cavaliers are destined to succeed now that the “burden” of LeBron has been lifted off their shoulders. This letter has been perceived as a clear overreaction. Gilbert powerfully expressed his feelings towards LeBron, declaring, “I personally guarantee that the Cleveland Cavaliers will win an NBA Championship before the self-titled former ‘king’ wins one.” Gilbert also insists that Cleveland’s infamous curse and championship drought has been removed, taken with the Chosen One to South Beach. Many NBA analysts, even those who disapprove of LeBron’s decision, feel that Gilbert’s reaction highlights Cleveland’s ungratefulness. LeBron decided to leave a crumbling franchise, gain a new start in another state, and sacrifice glory and cash for the ultimate goal. What’s so bad about that? Welcome to Miami, Lebron.

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help stomachs each new indignity, each new request to use a separate bathroom because they are “diseased,” to thank their white employers for building them a separate bathroom—with grace and tenacity and even resolve to make things different for their children.

Stockett writes with such eloquence and clarity that no barriers exist between you, the reader, and Eugenia, the insecure twenty-four year old, who, when not smoking, clickity-clacks on her typewriter and longs to publish something with more depth than housekeeping advice columns. Some lines have so much punch they beg to be re-read and then re-read again: “If chocolate was a sound, it would’ve been Constantine’s voice singing. If singing was a color, it would’ve been the color of that chocolate.” More than anything, Stockett allows her characters to take the front seat, to hold your hand as they share their story—one that glimmers with laughter and heartbreak, with love and a celebration of life.



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they recall their now grown-up daughter or son sprawled out on the playroom floor, like Andy, with toys by their side and joy in their eyes. Children who were Andy’s age when Toy Story 1 was released are now on the cusp of adulthood. For parents, Toy Story 3 is a visual wake-up call that the delicate child-parent bond has either already changed or is bound to change soon.

For teenagers, Toy Story 3 exists as a warning that childhood doesn’t last forever. However, the movie brilliantly avoids conveying this message in a depressing manner. Instead, Andy ultimately makes the decision to “lend” his toys to a younger neighbor as he leaves for college. Andy is the “big brother” and we, in the audience, are the younger siblings, watching, as our hero deliberately leaves behind the trademarks of his childhood because he knows they will be better appreciated elsewhere. It’s bittersweet but ultimately what it depicts is the beauty of growing up—that although we can’t hold on to certain dreams, aspirations or even toys forever, there is always someone underneath us who will cherish what we held so dear not too long ago.

Toy Story 3 is so exceedingly popular in comparison to Toy Story 1 because it acknowledges what we all know to be true: childhood isn’t forever. Toy Story 1 left us with the oddly unsettling idea that youth is eternal and that our toys would forever be at the top of our shelves and packing lists. It is only with the making of Toy Story 3 that Pixar reminds us of the inevitability of growing up. Yet, the movie gently reassures us that the end of one childhood can be the beginning of another. Laden with a painstaking truth and a cutesy, captivating story to depict it, Toy Story 3 books us for a play date with our own destiny—and, with Andy as our guide, we are prepared to rock it.



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of 27 passes for 171 yards with a touchdown and an interception. The Vikings lost the game 14-9. Favre missed his go-to receiver Sidney Rice who is recovering from a hip injury. Favre’s inexperience with his new receivers led to a Week 2 heart-breaking loss to the Miami Dolphins. Despite their sluggish start, look for the Vikings to make a playoff push down the stretch when it matters most and win a NFC Wild Card spot.





that the city is made up of many different nationalities. In fact, I myself am asked a few times in just that one day where I come from. The Indian man sitting behind the counter even asks me if I am Indian. ... strange, I know.

Day 3: It's all about inspiration. Although floor plans were already decided upon, She and I need some more inspiration for the store's layout. So we head to SOHO, a place where art and living are meshed into one beautiful town. We are captivated by the majestic stores of fashion geniuses such as Charles Nolan and Martin Margiela. What I see in Day 3 is not what one can call "practical" clothing, or in fashion terms, a Ready-to-Wear Collection. Yet, the chic attire and edgy styles create extraordinary works of art that get my fashion juices flowing and provide fresh ideas for the client's store.

That day, while scrutinizing the most beautiful and regal glass stiletto, I learned a very powerful lesson. Just as we all run on spiritual tanks that need to be constantly inspired by G-dly things, we also need to replenish ourselves with our simple hobbies and likes. Indulging in hobbies may seem selfish but doing so can oftentimes help one run his or her spiritual tank much more smoothly.

As the cab drives by Bleecker Street, I can't help but inquire of She: "Am I really helping you? Because I feel that I'm enjoying myself too much."

Day 4: All I can recall is hectic, hectic, and hectic. The combination of a challenging job and the pulsating fashion industry of New York City has yielded a truly remarkable summer experience. If only we could all find work that makes us feel as though we are enjoying ourselves too much.



*Continued from page 4*

vital as leading economists feel that a rise in taxes could plunge America headfirst into a much feared double-dip recession. Another key change to this bill is that unlike the Pelosi bill, which punishes small businesses with onerous mandates and exorbitant taxes, the Republican plan gives small businesses the power to pool together and offer health care at lower prices, just as corporations and labor unions do. This plan is sure to stimulate job growth, rather than hinder it in ways the current bill surely will.

The Democratic Party rode a wave of change into political power five years ago, but what did they really accomplish? They merely managed to swell our debt, taxes, and unemployment to critical levels. Maybe big banks and special interests can afford another four years of Democrats in Congress—but small businesses and American taxpayers certainly can't.

## STAND UP *Continued from page 1*

cussions for teen drivers. In fact, "STANDUP Act" is an acronym for all the various rules encapsulated by the act. Firstly, it would mandate a three-stage process to obtain full licensure. This process would include securing a learner's permit, which could be obtained at the minimum age of 16, an intermediate stage, and the final stage of unrestricted full licensure which could be attained at the minimum age of 18. An additional amendment encompassed by the STANDUP Act would prohibit teens from using any communication devices such as cell phones until full licensure is obtained. Furthermore, the new law would restrict unsupervised nighttime driving for drivers who are still in the learner's permit phase or the intermediate stage.

So, would this new act be an annoyance? Yes! However, I believe the law needs to be passed in order to maintain safer roads and defy the number one killer of American teens: car crashes. As a 16 year old teen driver myself, I certainly acknowledge the inconveniences accompanying the STANDUP Act, but at the same time I concede that the overwhelming advantages of passing such a law overshadow the inevitable hindrances.

The likelihood that the STANDUP Act will be passed is great because there will be incentive grants of 25 million dollars for the states that comply with the law's requirements within three years of its enactment. If these incentive grants won't do the trick, then the government will impose sanctions on the states refusing to comply with the act in order to encourage these states to meet the necessary requirements. To stand up to the STANDUP Act would be to perpetuate shocking statistics. As teen drivers, we owe ourselves more.



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vote, not along party lines, but for the good of the country. Indeed, with virtually no exceptions, the Republicans have voted against any bill proposed by a Democrat, including the Health Care Reform Bill which will insure over 40 million previously uninsured Americans in future years. Whereas the Democrats are a very diverse group (such that it is nearly miraculous if they all vote the same on a bill), there have been instances in the last two years where almost every Republican voted against a bill.

The importance of voting in this year's congressional elections should not be lost on high-schoolers of voting age. The future of our country, or at least of the next two years, potentially hangs in the balance. In these times we cannot afford to have a split Congress and presidency. It is pivotal that we continue to work towards a better future. With Republicans back in the driver's seat, America will be pulled back into the past.



# The Death of Middot in the Gilded Age

Leora Litwin ('12)

We are Orthodox Jews living in America in the 21st century. Fact. We walk outside and billboards portray images of both men and women clad in what should barely be acceptable as proper coverage. We casually drive down the street in search of Kosher restaurants, though there hardly seems to be a shortage of McDonalds and Burger Kings cropping up. We tune in to our televisions only to be repulsed by the vulgarity and disre-

spect exhibited by characters in shows



and movies. Immoral behavior, in stark contrast to our Jewish standards, streams across the media and tabloids and infiltrates our homes and communities. Ironically, to be an Orthodox Jew in as affluent and democratic a country as America has not proven easy. Jewish teenagers are especially vulnerable to these dangerous forces; many young adults find their middot and sense of Jewish identity dwindling as they succumb to the ideals of our surroundings.

The Torah elevates Bnei Yisrael to the status of an “Or LaGoyim”—“a light unto other nations.” Implicit in this “call to action” is our responsibility to represent a people that embodies middot tovot: positive character traits, outstanding moral aptitude, and the ability to forge meaningful, respectful interpersonal relationships. Yet, basic ethical qualities seem lacking in today’s youth. Jewish teens need to focus on their “moral GPS system.”

Rabbi Aharon Hersh Fried, in his fascinating article “Is There a Disconnect between Torah Learning and Torah Living?” suggests that flaws in the Jewish educational system are partly responsible for the lack of middot amongst teenagers. He perceives the central focus of Judaic teachings to capitalize on “inflexible stringencies regarding outer implications such as tzniut and kashrut”—at the expense of internal growth. According to his observations, today’s Orthodox community often emphasizes external religious practices rather than proper moral conduct. He further contends that teachers and parents often refrain from incorporating middot into disciplinary discussions because of the fear of overwhelming teenagers. There is only so much a kid can handle, they say, and teens are inherently defiant of the opinions and requests of those in authoritative positions. “Middot 101” in addition to the complex laws of Judaism will supposedly result in an information overload that will cause teens to rebel.

Rabbi Fried’s article sheds light on the mentality of the Jewish teenager: he feels tremendous pressure to accomplish the lofty goals set by parents and teachers. Overwhelmed and under pressure, teens resort to shortcut methods such as cheating to get ahead.

Phillip Schwadel of the University of North Carolina in his essay “Jewish Teens’ Syncretism and Exposure to Jewish Life,” explores the underlying forces that are stripping Jewish teens of their ethical ideals and moral behavior. He says it like it is: “Jewish teens tend not to stress the

uniqueness of Judaism, and thus, the future of Judaism as a distinctive religious form in the United States may be in jeopardy.” Indeed, Jewish teenagers are not immune to peer pressure and sadly it is often the misbehaving kid who acquires the esteemed title of being “cool.” It’s the teenager who belittles others, who bullies his peers—in short, the kid with the poor middot—who is often more popular than his classmate with proper conduct. It becomes accepted that those who break the rules claim victory in any given popularity contest. Teens are aware of their immoral actions, but they make negative choices because of the thrill of being “cooler.” Peer pressure is the driving force behind misbehavior and teenagers need to know that simply and willingly choosing “good” over “bad”—irrespective of what their friends deem cool—will direct them on a morally just path of living.

Ultimately, today’s teenagers are bombarded with profanity, vulgarity, and indecency. The explosive confluence of corrupt ideals and flawed societal attitudes has led many teens to engage in immoral activities such as cheating, drinking, etc and has sparked an overall deficiency in strong middot. Our moral compasses are largely established in our adolescent years; it is imperative that E stand for ethical not egotistic, that S connote selflessness and not selfishness, that W indicate will-power and not weakness, and that N represent not negligence but nobility.

## Adventure

# ACHVA: ADVENTURES IN WESTERN AMERICA

BY: AARON ZIMMERMAN ('13)

This summer, I experienced the unparalleled Achva West. It was more than just a traveling tour spanning from Denver to Los Angeles in six weeks or an itinerary teeming with new, daily activities or even a program where the campers epitomize, well, Achva – togetherness. It was greater than the sum of its parts because it afforded me a unique glimpse into the fabric of Western America on the one hand and a deeper appreciation for nature and G-d's creations on the other.



Our group of seventy soon made its way across the Western side of America. We trekked through mountainous terrains and deserts and explored a plethora of national

parks and landmarks including the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Yosemite National Park. I encountered snow and 113 degree heat, altitudes of over 5000 feet and the depths of the Grand Canyon. The physical beauty of the views and diverse landscape was enhanced by the information I learned about them; I came to appreciate God's glorious work on both a physical and intellectual level. I never realized how truly beautiful our planet was until I witnessed these natural wonders that Hashem created. Clearly, only a superior power could create the wonders I saw this summer.

Yet Achva juxtaposed the natural with the urban. When not hiking up mountains, we traveled through the bustling, vibrant cities of the West. Las Vegas, for instance, practically pulsed with never-ending excitement and activity. On every street another hotel loomed and in every hotel was a high-class shopping mall and millions of dollars' worth of design and architecture that mimicked the cultures of the world. The Venetian featured imitation Gondola rides and the Wynn displayed foreign luxury cars. San Francisco proved to be a city of both history and modernity. The shops and eateries of Fisherman's Wharf had a decidedly urban vibe while its port led to Alcatraz, a historical prison of the past. Finally, Los Angeles represented the city of celebrities, movie-magic, and flat out materialism. While I was in LA, reality seemed to take

a vacation. The movie making in Sony Studios brought the impossible to life and the luxurious Rodeo Drive, consumed by high-end stores and ostentatious foreign cars, made any mall seem utterly substandard. Overall, this dynamic culture effectively burst my "Boca bubble" and provided insight into the make-up and spirit of America's West Coast.

This summer was a fusion of the best of the outdoors and the indoors. I learned much about myself and the world at large while gaining a profound appreciation for G-d's world. Rodeo Drive met the Grand Canyon.

## In Love With Israel

BY: DANIELLE SOBOL ('13)



With the scent of homemade falafel and shwarma and snippets of conversations in all languages known to man lingering in the air, there's only one place I can be: Israel. This summer, I had the privilege of visiting this incredible country for one month. With prominent local sights such as Ben Yehuda and King George Street, Machne Yehuda and the Western Wall, Israel is full of tourist sights that attract people from all areas of the world, creating a cultural melting pot. Luckily for me, I was able to encounter firsthand many of the famous tourist attractions that are essential to having the most authentic Israel experience. Up north,, I rappelled off a mountain and crawled through mud caves. In Tsfat, I was able to learn about the ancient Sephardic Jewish community that has lived there for centuries. Back in Jerusalem, I felt the holiness of the city as I visited the Western Wall and other sacred sites. I feel so lucky to have been able to have this amazing summer experience—to learn about my people in my homeland.

### YOU ARE WHAT YOU WEAR...OR NOT

BY MOSHE LEVENSON ('14) AND AVRHAM ADELMAN ('14)

“She’s a Bais Yaakov girl. She’s left of center. He wears a Kippah Srugah. He’s Charedi. She goes to the movies.” So begins David Mandel’s article, “Black Hat, Gray Hat, Kippah Srugah - Is a Person’s Hat a Reflection of Who He Is?” In the piece,



Mandel suggests that “the hat” has evolved into “the ultimate symbol of Orthodoxy rather than the individual who is wearing the hat.” Though we may not be what we wear, we are often perceived to be what we wear. And though we bristle at the idea of evaluating people by something as superficial as dress, sometimes we indulge in the practice ourselves. To combat this issue in an academic setting, high schools implement both dress codes and uniforms. The decision to enforce or not to enforce dress restrictions is profoundly nuanced; it raises the much more global issues of uniformity vs. conformity, unity vs. self-expression.

The way one dresses affects his behavior. For example, “If we dress for work in formal clothing, we will treat our job very seriously. If we dress in beach wear, it’s harder to concentrate. We feel differently about ourselves. Our whole at-

titude becomes more casual.” (Aish.com). As Jewish teenagers, one of our main responsibilities is to learn Torah. Therefore, a primary goal of regulating students’ dress in Orthodox Jewish Schools is to facilitate the utmost respect for Torah learning. If someone treats his work seriously, he dresses appropriately. If a student treats his Judaic studies seriously, he too dresses appropriately.

Everything is relative, the saying goes, and uniforms are no exception. The uniform policies in many Orthodox schools appear exceedingly strict when compared to the more lenient policies of most public schools. Indeed, some Orthodox schools require all students to wear black hats, suit jackets, and velvet kippot. (Aish.com and Ecs.org) Uniforms can be uncomfortable and exceptionally plain and boring, and therefore students might prefer to pick out their own clothes. In schools which mandate uniforms, however, a sense of community is created. The power of this unity should not be underestimated. Just as the distinct branches of the Israeli army are brought together by the uniforms the soldiers wear, distinct members of a student body can be united by the clothing they wear. (Aish.com)

With uniforms, no one student would be better than the next because she bought the latest Chanel blouse (press-citizen.com). School uniforms also curtail the negative influence of clothing with inappropriate themes. (712educators.about.com). Since uniforms would presumably comply with the school’s standards of dress, a uniform policy could mitigate the frequency of clothing violations, such as wearing a skirt that is shorter than the school allows.

The dress code is a valuable compromise: it can ensure an atmosphere conducive to Torah learning while preserving students’ self-expression. One must still dress modestly, but there is more of a variety of permissible clothing. (Even with a dress code, oftentimes all male students are required to wear tzizit.). Students should be able to express their individuality by dressing in any way they wish, and this is why most schools institute more lenient dress code policies. Indeed, the freedom to choose outfits in the morning enables students to display their unique personalities and style. (712educators.about.com)

In an already divisive, superficial world, clothing generates superfluous barriers. As dress and behavior are linked, Orthodox Jewish Schools regulate dress to create an environment conducive to spiritual growth and Torah learning. However, distinctive modes of dress also promote self-expression and the development of personal style. The role and efficacy of dress codes and uniforms vary. Perhaps the only common denominator between schools is that any policy on dress is sure to be characterized by a

**“Clothing Generates Superfluous Barriers”**

particular set of rules, students must be honest about the labels they consciously or subconsciously place on others based on their appearance and apparel. After all, we are more than a hat.