

# Words of Introduction

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

*The David Mitzner Dean, Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future*

The Talmud in *Kiddushin* 39b states *s'char mitzvah bhai almah lekah*— there is no reward in this world for the performance of commandments. This Talmudic statement seems to be in conflict with the words found in the Torah which expound on the material reward for observance of Torah and the physical punishment for disobedience. R. Samuel Eidels, the *MaHarSha*, attempts to resolve this apparent conflict by suggesting that there are two paradigms of reward for the celebration of the Divine mission. There is reward for an individual observing commandments and an additional component for adherence by community. The Talmud's comment focuses on the individual. Reward for personal observance is not manifested in the physical; rather, it is found in the calibration of the soul and the achievement of a spiritual rendezvous with God. The narrative in the Torah focuses on the reward and punishment which are consequences of how the community engages in embracing the will of God.

*YU To-Go* is one of many mediums we utilize to share the Torah of our Yeshiva. It is my hope that through the exploration of ideas in this virtual sefer each reader's personal embrace with Shavuot, the holiday celebrating the covenantal relationship between ourselves and God, is enhanced. We have designed this project not only for the individual, studying alone, but perhaps even more for a *חברותא* (a pair studying together) that wish to work through the study matter together, or a group engaged in facilitated study.

In this volume we engage in two critical contemporary issues: 1: Singles and 2. Yeshiva Day School affordability.

YUConnects is a program sponsored by Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future, available to Yeshiva University undergraduate and rabbinical students, single undergraduate and rabbinic alumni, and currently expanding to the larger orthodox community; featuring activities and events designed to facilitate meeting opportunities and networking.

The goal of this initiative is to create comfortable opportunities, for single men and women to socialize and connect. A special feature of YUConnects is our volunteer connectors - a varied group of talented and trained married men & women available to meet with members individually. There are over 80 YU volunteer connectors across the Jewish world. In the past year and a half YUConnects has facilitated over 40 marriages.

Yet our goal must be greater than the above. There are significant roadblocks that challenge young men and women in developing relationships. As a premier Torah institution and a great University we must convene our spiritual and intellectual resources to create a new model removing barriers which all our Roshei Yeshiva and mental health professionals classify as destructive.

*This is a community issue and requires a community response.* Like the observance of any commandment, this communal dimension adds a level of shared responsibility that cannot be achieved solely by the efforts of even the most committed and selfless individuals. With the guidance of lay communal leaders who came together last summer at Yeshiva University's leadership conference, we established Shabbat *Parshat B'har-Bechukotai* (May 8<sup>th</sup>) as a Shabbat focused on "Creating Connections." YU CJF in partnership with the OU, Young Israel, Make A Shidduch Foundation, Future Simchas, Only Simchas, Shalom Task Force, Sasson v'Simcha, Gateways, and Saw You At Sinai worked with over 80 communities to use this Shabbat to have communal conversation on this issue. We provided educational guides, source material on how to create singles events and a video sharing concerns from the perspective of singles on this issue.

YU Connects would never have happened without the tireless efforts and vision of Rebbetzin Dr. Efrat Sobolofsky. She has toiled in this issue with a single-mindedness and drive that is rarely seen. President Richard M. Joel has consistently sought to improve the academic, Torah environment, and student life at Yeshiva University. He recognized the importance of this issue and afforded us the capacity to create YUConnects. We are all in his debt.

On the holiday which portrays the marriage of Keneset Yisroel to Hashem, Rabbis Schacter, Sobolofsky, and Mrs. Mindy Eisenman have prepared Torah pieces focusing on this issue in the enclosed Shavuot To Go.

Additionally, Rabbi Josh Flug has contributed an important piece allowing us to focus on the ongoing issue of day school costs and its effect on our community.

May we continue to achieve meaningful connections: in our personal search for a relationship with God, amongst those who are looking to find their soul mates, and in developing communities empowering us to live purposeful and meaningful lives.

Byedidut,

*Rabbi Kenneth Brander*