Yizkor

The Yeshiva mourns the tragic death of beloved alumnus Yaakov Levi Matanky z″l, who studied at the Yeshiva in ‘99-’01.
Yaakov, born in 1981, was the oldest of seven children born to the Matanky family, a pillar of the Chicago Jewish community. He was devoted to Camp Moshava, which he attended almost every summer of his life – first as a child of staff members, then as a camper, and eventually as a staff member himself. Yaakov set an example to others with his warmth and humor, his enthusiasm for life, and his commitment to Torah and mitzvot. He spent two years in Yeshivat HaR Etzion, where in addition to the regular course of studies he pursued a teacher’s certificate from the Herzog College so that he could teach Torah in the golah.
Yaakov was killed in a car accident near Camp Moshava of Wild Rose, Wisconsin on July 11, 2002.

Hesped for a Friend

By Dov Karrol ’95

Yaakov was everybody’s best friend. Everyone who came in contact with him was touched by his warm smile and friendly “shmooz”. When Yaakov went to visit YU last year, within minutes he had seated himself in a central location, from which he was introducing himself to every student who passed by. In the Yeshiva, he had a nickname of endearment for seemingly every fellow talmid, and even a song for some people’s names. He instinctively knew how to cheer people up, and how to say just the right thing at the right moment.

I remember that one time when many talmidim in the Yeshiva were concerned about the security situation, Yaakov, making reference to his own nickname, said to a fellow talmid: “Tell your parents the Yeshiva has a TANK stationed right on campus.” I’m not sure if that was the message those parents really wanted to hear, but it certainly put a smile on the face of that talmid.

Yaakov excelled at helping others, often putting his own needs and interests second. His first priority in deciding how he would spend his college years was to determine how he could be most helpful to the Jewish community. Yaakov felt it was important to devote his efforts to Bnei Akiva of Chicago, and recognizing that he could contribute in ways that others could not, he organized his life plans around that goal. But his willingness to volunteer in any capacity showed his true humility. Yaakov told Camp Moshava this past year that he would do whatever job they needed, rather than asking for one that he preferred, despite his many years of experience in the camp.

Yaakov was very much at home at Moshava. He grew up there, in every sense, and stories about camp would inevitably come up in almost every conversation with Yaakov. He was certainly quite memorable in his role at the camp’s “tishes,” where he would lead songs and conduct the proceedings with the help of his very powerful voice.

There is no longer a tank on campus at Yeshivat HaR Etzion, and there is no longer a tank at Bnei Akiva of Chicago, nor is there a tank at Camp Moshava in Wisconsin. Nor is there a tank in the Matanky home. If you will excuse the image, we all need to carry a tank in our hearts, and try to serve Hashem with the enthusiasm and care with which Yaakov did.

Yehi zikrro barukh.
The Yeshiva mourns the tragic death of talmid Yoni Jesner z"l, who studied at the Yeshiva in '01 and '02.

On September 19, 2002 Yoni Jesner, 19, of Glasgow, Scotland and his cousin Gideon Black, both students at Yeshivat Har Etzion, were traveling to a Tel Aviv hotel to visit with Gideon's father when a suicide bomber boarded their bus. Gideon was moderately injured. Yoni was mortally injured and died of his wounds the next day.

He was one of six people killed in the attack.

Yoni was named after Yonatan Netanyahu, who was killed leading the successful 1976 Entebbe rescue that saved the lives of 104 hijacked hostages. Yoni is survived by his parents, two brothers and two sisters. His family donated his organs for transplant, and he is buried in Jerusalem.

"It was your love of Israel and Judaism that brought you here to study and it is here you now rest," his brother Ari Jesner said.

"It was your love of mankind that was going to take you to medical school in London with the intention of moving to Israel to work as a doctor. You were also a role model for me, your older brother. You taught me and all the family so much about love, Judaism, compassion, and understanding. In your short life of 19 years you achieved what most people do not achieve in double that time."

Yoni was involved in all aspects of Jewish life in Scotland. He ran Bnei Akiva and the Jewish youth council in Scotland, he was a Jewish studies teacher, volunteered in the chevra kadisha, helped run the youth and adult services in his synagogue, prepared boys for their bar mitzvahs, and had a nightly chavruta with the Av Bet Din of Glasgow. He was planning to begin medical training in London after completing his yeshiva studies.

Yeshiva students began a Tehillim vigil at Yoni's bedside and in the Yeshiva immediately after the attack, and Harav Aharon Lichtenstein and many Ramim were with the family in the hospital. Following his death, the Roshei Yeshiva and Ramim held special meetings with the talmidim, as well as arranging sessions with psychologists, and memorial shiurim were delivered in Israel, England, and Scotland. An azkara was held at the Yeshiva on the shloshim of Yoni's passing at which Yoni's father, Joseph Jesner, and his cousin Gideon Black spoke eloquently, alongside Yeshiva Ramim.

Gideon related that Yoni had spent his entire summer before coming to Yeshiva preparing short shiurim to be given to Jewish children in public schools in Scotland. He had been doing this important mitzvah himself, and wanted to make sure that someone could continue to do so in his absence. His last day was spent doing mitzvot – visiting a shiva house, reading from the Torah, returning a lost pen to its rightful owner.

In a eulogy distributed through the VBM, Rav Alex Israel '85, wrote: "The vitality and potency of Yoni's character demonstrates the greatness of our lives as human beings with the potential to make a difference, to make the most of every moment that we are in this world – to achieve, to grow, to give, to care."

An email from Yoni's mother to the Yeshiva
Subject: Shabbat Shalom
Date: Friday Oct. 4, 2002

Dearest Rabbanim, boys, everyone at Har Etzion, including the laundry man whom Gideon told us Yoni had befriended,

As I sit here back in Glasgow, I feel that a huge part of my heart and soul are with you all. In my mind's eye, I can walk the paths and hallways, climb the steps, and enter the beautiful beit midrash. I can see all the talmidim and hear the noise all around. It is so hard for us here, and you there, to see Yoni's makom empty, but I know he is very close to us wherever we are, and that his soul will continue to be a deep part of all of us who knew and loved him. I miss you all so much and will always feel better just for having met you and now having you as part of our lives as Yoni did.

All the family join me in wishing you Shabbat Shalom.

Love,

Marsha