

# The Flame

WIKI 707

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Dear Rabbi:

As a college student and as a leader of the Jewish community at Columbia University, I am greatly concerned, and I want to share that concern with you.

I am a "baalat teshuvah", a product of N.C.S.Y., and I came to Columbia excited about joining the religious organizations on campus--but I found most of them dull, with leadership that failed even to attempt to understand the needs of the campus community. As president of the University's Seudot Shabbat Society, my dealings with the leaders of the other student-run Jewish organizations and my commitment to the well-being and furtherance of a very positive kind of Jewish life on campus, have lead me to believe that very radical changes must be made.

The existing student-run national college organizations do not meet the needs of most Jewish college communities. In my dealings with a cross-section of the community, I have come to understand the desperate need to reach a greater number of students than is now being reached, and more generally to improve the quality of Jewish life on campus.

I have sincerely come to believe that a more total, a more inclusive national Jewish students' organization is needed on all college campuses. When Jewish values are being constantly challenged in the college setting, where can a student turn? What avenues exist for him to air his doubts and questions, and have them reasonably answered in a Torah context? It is because of the dismal, tragic answer to these questions that we must understand the need for an organization that will integrate and facilitate the needs of the Yeshiva graduate, the "baal teshuvah", and the non-religious student. We don't believe that the existing student-run organizations meet the needs of all students. Therefore we must dedicate and forge a new organization that is truly representative of these goals.

For the Yeshiva graduate, we can hold religious and social events; for the "baal teshuvah" we can sponsor learning sessions and help to ease the transition from being a member of a student organization to becoming a secure, viable, accepted member of a complete community; for the non-religious, we must stress the importance of upholding Jewish values in every aspect of life, attempting to תקן rather than making the non-religious feel that they are being proselytized by those of the same faith. These programs can, and even more importantly must be integrated, so that a total and more unified community results. No one of these segments of Jewish campus life can be ignored.

With your support, advice, and funds we can build a new organization that will try to unify Jewish college students on each individual campus and throughout the country as a whole. The student-run organizations that presently exist are clearly no longer adequate. Too many Jewish students are being lost to other causes and to other religions, because there is no Jewish organization that has a program which fulfills their needs.

What greater good is there than bringing Jews back to Judaism-- than unifying those individuals and segments of communities that have so much potential and that might otherwise be lost?

The question of the condition and quality of life for Jewish students on college campuses is in essence the question of survival. Can we ignore it any longer?

B'Ahavat Yisrael,

*Ruth Szymkowiec*

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