

Kol Bogrei Rambam is the Alumni Committee's monthly e-newsletter for and about Maimonides School graduates. Each month we share information on individual graduates' ventures and accomplishments, as well as general news notes, all reflecting the school's mission of preparing educated, observant Jews to be contributing members of society. Your ideas and accomplishments will help sustain and strengthen this key communications tool; please forward to alumni@maimonides.org.

Alumnus Says His Startup Making Robots More Accessible in Industry

Alon Kosowsky-Sachs '15 built a go-kart out of wood for his senior project.

Fast-forward seven years, and Alon and his partner Josh Gruenstein have launched a successful startup, Tutor Intelligence, that its website says "was born out of a desire to bring robots into the real world, to meet the needs of the facilities that have been left out of the charge towards automation."

"We're making robots accessible to the facilities that have been left out of the charge towards automation, so they can compete with the biggest players despite changing demographics and an ever-evolving supply chain," the fledgling company proclaims. "We're working towards a world where robot intelligence is ubiquitous, where robots are available to every facility who needs them, enabling a new era of the physical economy."

There was more than the go-kart, of course: undergraduate degrees in electrical engineering and computer science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; a Master's of Engineering in artificial intelligence from MIT; and experience with Amazon Robotics, Realtime Robotics, and MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory.

The business model has been popular for a few years, Alon said, and he and his associate recognized the potential when they started attending trade shows last year.

"We recognized the kind of customer we were talking to – smaller scale, 20-100 employees. They spend so much money on labor all the time, using a lot of really low-tech solutions for hardware. They might be dropping hundreds of thousands a month on labor costs."

"Our new artificial intelligence tool allows robots to change what they're doing, depending on the task at hand," Alon said. "People don't have millions to drop on robot automation tools, but they can afford the labor."

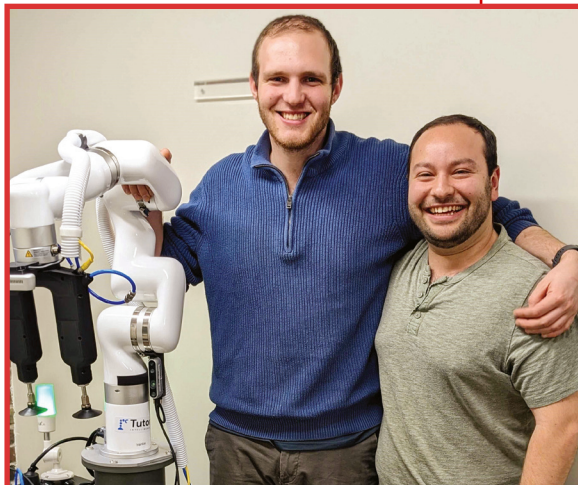
The tasks are "extremely mundane and mind-numbing," such as case unloading, Alon related. The robot receives "a box filled with an object, and puts one at a time on a conveyor belt. A robot will happily do this 16 hours a day. In factories where we are doing this, people are freed to become robot supervisors."

Tutor Intelligence charges \$12 per hour per robot. "A robot shows up on their doorstep," Alon said, and "customers only pay for the equipment when it's running. Our robots are connected to the Internet; we know when they are being used."

The company website proclaims: "Tutor's robot arms arrive at your doorstep, ready to work right out of the box. With just power and WiFi, your robots will work by-the-hour, alongside your existing workforce."

Tutor Intelligence doesn't build robots from scratch, Alon explained. "We are mostly a software company. We are not building robot arms, we are buying them from our partners, designed for very repeatable work. We equip them with cameras that we buy from our camera partners and connect those to computer systems we build ourselves. We're integrating a lot but not doing manufacturing ourselves."

"We are still figuring out what our processes are going to be," Alon continued. "We are experimenting now with a few different sizes and kinds of robots – light work, heavy work, it really depends on the task at hand. We are not trying to limit ourselves."



Alon Kosowsky-Sachs '15, with colleague and classmate Dani Lerner (right) and a collaborative robot arm equipped with 3-D cameras and a custom-built suction gripper.

Tutor Intelligence now has 16 employees and seven months ago moved into offices in Boston's Downtown Crossing. "A lot of it is finding people you can work with, do incredible things."

"When we were running Tutor out of my apartment, and got some funding to take it further, we were looking to bring on robotics engineers," Alon related. "Well, it just so happened that my friend and classmate **Dani Lerner '15** was in the middle of a robotics Master's at the University of Maryland, and he was our first intern – and shortly thereafter employee number three at Tutor." He has now been part of the company for almost a year.

"Of the first five members of our team, four of us have been to Jewish day schools," Alon noted. "The bar was set high at Maimonides. At MIT I felt very prepared."

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Graduate Finds Career in Interior Design "Dynamic and Exciting"

Shifra Berg '15 says that often she will walk into a room and immediately her "gears start turning as to what I would do with it, especially if it is an inspiring space."



Shifra Berg '15

She's not sure whether this is an innate talent, but it certainly is helpful professionally.

Shifra is an interior designer in New York with Meyer Davis, which she calls a multi-disciplinary design studio whose primary focus is on hospitality design – hotels, bars, restaurants, and resorts.

Currently she is part of project teams for three simultaneous ventures: a high-rise apartment building near the Boston Children's Museum and beachside resorts in Mexico and Belize.

"I'm grateful to be at a place that's exposing me to these types of projects," Shifra said. "It feels dynamic and exciting."

There tends to be a misunderstanding about interior design, Shifra explained. "People often think it's just decorating. But interior decorating is focused on the adornment of spaces that already exist. Interior designers are working from the time the project is conceived – choosing where walls are going, how people find their way around the building."

"Interior architecture and design is a more fitting title," she continued. "We create floor plans and the other drawings that make up our construction document set, working in tandem with the architect and mechanical engineer on the project. We all have our own scope of work, and

everything is holistically coordinated. All the elements have to be working harmoniously."

Shifra added, "You need a degree to call yourself an interior designer." Hers is from Drexel University in Philadelphia, which Shifra said is not only one of the best programs in the country, with a dedicated four-year interior design major, but also provided a campus experience with a vibrant Jewish life, not available at some specialized art schools.

The curriculum "exposed me to technical aspects and to the business side of things – the whole industry," Shifra said. The six-month cooperative education component found her back in Boston, working at an architecture and interior design firm.

Her first exposure to the excitement of interior design was when she was only six years old. "My parents hired someone to renovate their living and dining rooms. I remember being totally wowed by the transformation into the beautiful, functional space she was able to achieve."

"In high school I started to get more interested and sought out internship opportunities," Shifra continued, including one with textile showrooms at the Boston Design Center. "I decided this would be my path of study." Maimonides studio art teacher Susana McDonnell also was "definitely influential" in her development of art skills.

Shifra noted that former Sharon resident Alex Woogmaster was instrumental in launching her professional career. "We grew up in the same *shul* – he was one of the cool older kids," she related. "We would talk about interior design when he was home and we kept in touch over Instagram."

Fast-forward to March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic was raging, and "My in-person internship in Philly had just been canceled. Two weeks later, Alex unknowingly reached out from Las Vegas and asked if I wanted to intern remotely for him." She not only finished her degree while working for Woogmaster Studio part-time, but then joined their staff for another year and seven months.

"That was my one connection in the Jewish world to the industry," Shifra said. "Sometimes it just takes one."

Shifra explained that in her office, some designers focus on the interior architecture and others on the general category of furniture, fixtures, and equipment – "everything that would fall out if you shook the building," she laughed. "My firm has me on both sides, so it's nice that I can become a well-rounded designer."

"We get physical samples of all finishes," she explained. "We want to make sure all the colors and textures play nicely together. We spend a lot of time working on 3-D renderings and making sure the clients are able to visualize the space prior to construction."

Technology is an essential component. "Math has always been my weakest subject," Shifra admitted, but computer programs can produce square footage computations and proportions to scale. "It's been gratifying to see my brain work in new ways, ever since starting design school."

And then there's the ability to have video calls with clients thousands of miles away. But sometimes you just have to be there, and Shifra said she is looking forward to a site visit to Cabo, Mexico in early 2023.

Tutor Intelligence flourishing

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He explained the origin of the startup's name. "We didn't want to name our company with the suffix 'robotics.' And we realized early on that you can't really solve every problem with advanced artificial intelligence," Alon said.

"There have to be people helping out somewhere along the line – it's all about teaching this robot how to do things. For the foreseeable future, it's really people that matter."

Tutor is a novel approach to developing smart robotics applications with scalability

baked in. Videos and more information are available at tutorintelligence.com. If you are interested in getting in touch with Alon or the company, contact Mike Rosenberg, director of alumni relations, at mike@maimonides.org.

Ari Rockoff YU's First Dean for Values and Leadership

Rabbi Ari Rockoff '92 has joined the Yeshiva University leadership team in the new position of David Mitzner Community Dean for Values and Leadership.

"YU is a mission-driven institution," said Ari, noting that University President Ari Berman launched a "campaign for values and leadership" about a year ago. The five "core Torah values" that the university says "comprise our moral compass" are truth, life, compassion, redemption, and infinite human worth.

leaders, and start to cultivate and nurture that. You're only as good as your future, in any organization."

The university announced that one of Ari's key roles will be "to create expansive fee-for-service global Jewish adult education and executive leadership programs." He also will oversee existing community-based learning opportunities and online publications.

"In a post-COVID world, we have to be very aware of where the community is. Needs have shifted," Ari observed. "A lot of the work we are going to be doing involves executive board training, putting educational offerings online, and on the human capital end, making sure we have our leaders of tomorrow."

Brown said Ari will "bring his creative and strategic thinking to help us identify future leaders, on the undergraduate and graduate level, and find ways to support them through scholarships and newly-funded programs."

"It's a true homecoming," said Ari, who is a graduate of YU's Sy Syms School of Business and received his rabbinical ordination from RIETS. He also holds a Master's degree in Education from the university's Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration.

Professionally, he had a key role in creating major initiatives for Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future. Most recently, Ari was executive vice president of the Religious Zionists of America, and prior to that was the inaugural director of leadership development and strategic partnership at the Orthodox Union.

Ari will be working with colleagues at YU's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) and the Center for Values and Leadership, which is named in honor of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, zt"l, and Terri and Andrew Herenstein, who founded the center.

He noted that former Maimonides School parent Dr. Erica Brown, director of the center and the university's vice provost of values and leadership, created the position "as a way of taking the core values of YU and making sure they are imbedded in all the students and that they get transmitted to the community at large."

The position, Ari said, is "a mix of being able to create pathways and engagement with the community and transmitting those values in more targeted and focused ways." He explained that "the second role is really exciting, about next-generation leadership, the opportunity to mentor, to identify those future



Rabbi Ari Rockoff '92

Alumni NOTES

1985 and 1986

Mazal tov to **Lisi (Fishman) '86** and **Dr. Joshua Levisohn '85** on the engagement of their son, Tani Levisohn, to Tamar Jacobson. Tani's grandparents are Drs. Sylvia and Philip Fishman and Sybil and Dr. Steven Levisohn.

1988

Mazal tov to Dr. Karen and **Daniel Kosowsky** on the marriage of their son Benjamin to Rivka Zimm. Ben's grandmother is Mrs. Joyce Kosowsky.

1996

Mazal tov to Andrea and **Mendy Stein** on the engagement of their daughter Atara to Chaim Jaffe. Atara's grandparents are Freydie and Rabbi Zalmen Stein.

2004

Mazal tov to **Yael (Skversky)** and Gideon **Blocc** on the birth of their daughter, Amalya Hadassah. Grandparents are Karen Skversky and Philip Skversky.

2007

Mazal tov to **Ruthie (Zisblatt)** and Tani **Pollak** on the birth of their son. Grandparents are Drs. Laura and Sam Zisblatt.

2007 and 1979

Mazal tov to **Dena (Katz) '07** and Benjie **Frieling** on the birth of their son, Akiva Matan. Grandparents are Susan and **Alan Katz '79**. Great-grandparents are Helen and Bert Katz.

2010

Mazal tov to **Shalhevet (Sarah) Robinson '10** upon her marriage to Dvir Cahana. Shalhevet is the daughter of Debbie and Morris, ז"ל, Robinson.

2012

Mazal tov to **Aaron Brandt** on his marriage to Darcy Berger. Aaron is the son of Gretchen and Stewart Brandt.

2014

Mazal tov to **Keren Starobinski** on her engagement to Barak Talmor. Keren is the daughter of Shira and David Starobinski.

2016 and 1988

Mazal tov to **Nava Katz** on her engagement to Adoram Lalezari. Nava is the daughter of **Shari (Morgan) '88** and **David Katz '88**.

Condolences to...

Michael Singer '94, Jessica (Singer) Rich '98, Joy (Singer) Sydney '75, and Stewart Singer '84 on the loss of their beloved father and brother, Mr. Gary Singer, ז"ל.

My Life As a Teacher: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

By Yehudis Fishman '61

Like the famous role in *Mr. Holland's Opus*, teaching for me was often an afterthought. On one hand, living as a welfare child in the slums of Roxbury, the Judaic teachers at Maimonides School in Boston during the '40s and '50s were both my heroes and my saviors from an otherwise humdrum life. But so were the literary and mythic figures from classic literature that captured my imagination.

So, as my graduation drew near, being a teacher was too ordinary a profession for a dreamy, somewhat introverted Jewish girl. But, as the saying goes, *A mentch tracht un Gott lacht*, or its contemporary counterpart, "Life happens when you're making other plans."

As a newlywed, all of 18 years old, I found myself in the role of a teacher's assistant, playing with blocks long after my kindergarten class went on to other activities. From there it was a short leap to teaching *Mishlei*, the Book of Proverbs, to a class of girls about a year younger than I was at the time.

Much to my own surprise, I succeeded fairly well and was labeled a teacher long before I made a willing choice to adopt that profession.

What kept me there for almost half a century was the realization that I had a long-lasting impact on children — and later adults — that continued over a lifetime, and, in some cases, from my theological vantage point, even beyond.

A few examples: I once taught a latchkey boy who was much older than the other children in my favorite class, the second grade. At first he was a problem child I was forced to take in. Later, however, we both grew on each other, to the point where he became my helper.

On *Chanukah* that year, he even gave me a gift of an incomplete puzzle — his favorite, he told me shyly — wrapped in newspaper. Then, on the eve of Passover, I came to school and saw the newspaper headlines, "Nine-year-old and his younger

brother die in a house fire." My first reaction was to quit on the spot, but after a little more thought, it dawned on me that from a personal perspective, I may have been the most important person in his short life.



Yehudis Fishman '61

A similar story: Many years later, I taught a first-grade girl who died of cancer. Gathering up all the courage I could muster, I went to visit her in the hospital about a week before she passed away. I stood there trembling, no words coming to me. Instead, she offered me solace! "*Morah Yehudis*," she began, "don't be afraid for me. I'm going straight to heaven. And you're the one who taught me how to pray to G d."

Of course, it was not only those rare moments that made it all worthwhile. I once taught *Torah* subjects to the same class of girls through the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. By the third year, both the girls and I were so psychically connected that we rarely had to finish our sentences.

I still teach the little ones. And like the fledgling kindergarten teacher I became back in the decade of the sixties, I can fire up my imagination and engage theirs.

Their teachers in higher grades have repeated to me what they are told: "We heard that *Midrash* already; *Morah Yehudis* told it to us years ago."

As I continue teaching, I find myself receiving much more than I am giving. It's hard to say who, through these years, has grown more: I or my students. In the beginning, when the focus was on my benefits, I felt I would have to wait forever to see any positive results from my efforts. But, as I age, the rewards feel much more immediate.

Perhaps, like Mr. Holland, I have learned to appreciate what I give, rather than what I receive. Of course, it helps to get letters and e-mails — and nowadays, even Facebook comments — from former students, some of whom are already grandparents, who tell me how significantly I affected their lives.

In the end, I think that's what it's all about: Changing the world for good, one person at a time. I tell people that if we want to see enduring commitments, we can learn from the negative impact of terrorist children's education that we need to put more passion into education.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe once wrote to a teacher who was feeling isolated and lonely, saying that she should think about how the fruits of her labors continue to grow and flourish and dynamically impact the world. Those thoughts do, and will, sustain me for as long as I live — and, hopefully, beyond.

Yehudis Fishman has been teaching Torah and Chassidic writings for more than 40 years to students of all ages and backgrounds. She has been a director of several Jewish organizations in Santa Fe and Colorado. Her articles and poetry on a wide variety of Jewish topics have been featured in various publications, and also are available online.