

# LAKEWOOD INTERVIEW

Chaya Baumwolspiner

## Learning to Lead

It's not a Lakewood *mosad*, but there are strong links between Lakewood and the Kollel Hora'ah of America (KHA), a *halachah kollel* in Marlboro, New Jersey, that is training Rabbanim and other leaders of *Klal Yisrael*.

We asked its *Rosh Kollel*, Rabbi Mordechai Eisenberg, to tell us more about this unique *kollel*.

Can you begin by telling us why there is a need for a *kollel* that's devoted to gaining *semichah*?

The goal of many yeshivos today is to produce *talmidei chachamim* (rather than ordained Rabbanim). For those who want in addition to gain *semichah*, there are, of course, many wonderful *chaburos* learning toward the goal of *semichah*, but the additional required skills for actual *psak* training and leadership generally have to be done outside the *chaburah*, which includes finding a Rav to give them *shimush* (supervised practice).

The advantage of our *kollel* and others like it is that the *yungeleit* are able to learn the *halachah*, its practical application, and to gain supervision in one place, without the distraction of having to seek out Rabbanim on their own.

What motivated you to locate KHA in Marlboro, New Jersey?

Initially I taught *halachah* to a *semichah chaburah* at the Yeshiva of Staten Island, where my grandfather, Harav Reuvain Feinstein, *shlita*, is *Rosh Yeshivah*. Naturally, I followed the *derech halimud* of my great-grandfather, Harav Moshe Feinstein, *zt"l*, a unique and monumental method that delves into each *halachah* not (only) as a *psak* from *Shulchan Aruch*, but goes all the way back to its source in the *Gemara*. Accordingly, the *talmid* is able to understand the *lomdus* behind a *psak* at its core.

During this period, however, I was

becoming increasingly attracted to the concept of teaching *halachah* in the midst of an actual community, which would offer first-hand experience of the way the *halachah* is *paskened* in a real-life setting. When I mentioned this to my grandfather, he was very supportive of my idea, and gave me his heartfelt *brachos* that I should be able to make it a reality.

Providentially, at this point I was living in Marlboro, New Jersey, where I was very involved in *kiruv*. I was therefore ideally placed to mention to Harav Yitzchok Oratz, *Mara D'Asra* of the Monmouth Torah Links community in Marlboro, that I was interested in starting a *halachah kollel* right there in Marlboro. He was very excited at this prospect and welcomed us with open arms.

To his great credit, Rav Oratz was able to see in advance that the addition of a *kollel* would serve to strengthen the growing interest in Torah in Marlboro. Since its inception in 2014, he has been very close to the *kollel* and is always available to answer the questions of our *yungeleit*.

On the other hand, wouldn't it have been better, from your point of view, had you moved to a solidly *frum* community like Lakewood or Monsey?

No! Because Marlboro is a spiritually diverse community, the *she'eilos* that are directed to myself and my co-*Roshei Yeshivah*, Harav Avrohom Beren and Harav Shmuel Goldstein, are far more complex and wide-rang-



Receiving *semichah* from Harav Reuven Feinstein, *shlita*. (L-R): Rabbi Avrohom Beren; Rabbi Mordechai Eisenberg; Harav Feinstein, *shlita*; Rabbi Moshe Dovid Berman; and Rabbi Shmuel Goldstein.



Chag Hasemichah at Kollel Hora'ah of America.

ing than those that arise in a typical *frum* community.

Thanks to the convenient location of Marlboro, our *yungeleit* — who

come from Staten Island, Passaic, Edison and Lakewood (with a preponderance from Lakewood) — come face-to-face with a far greater variety



A view of the *beis medrash* at Kollel Hora'ah of America.

of *she'eilos* than they would witness in a more homogeneous community.

**In addition to the vast amounts of learning that *semichah* demands, are the *yungeleit* also taught some of the “non-academic” aspects that are involved in being a Rav?**

The *yungeleit* have an intense schedule of *limudim* and *shimush* in *psak*, but they are additionally expected to gain the tools that will enable them to transmit their knowledge to others. To this end, we provide courses in public speaking, communication, marriage counseling and more, taught by recognized experts in their respective fields.

**It sounds as if it should take a very long time for a *yungerman* to obtain *semichah*. Is this true?**

To cover the material in our curriculum would normally require six or more years, and the practical training would require practicing for a long time and taking additional courses. But on account of our highly-focused, and goal-oriented program, our hands-on approach, and the fact that we are embedded in a community where they interact with laymen, our *yungeleit* are able to attain all of these important goals in less than four years.

During this time, they are continuously encouraged to do *chazarah* on everything they learn, after which they receive regular *bechinot*, as well as larger tests from the renowned *posek* Harav Moshe Heinemann, *shlita*, of Baltimore, when they've completed a full section. I'll add here, with no small amount of pride, that due to COVID, Harav Heinemann was unable to test the *yungeleit* for two whole

years. When he was eventually able to resume testing, he quizzed the *yungeleit* on everything they'd learned in the interim. In the six-hour *bechinah* — which was very exacting — all our *yungeleit* passed with flying colors.

**Are the *yungeleit* expected to take positions as Rabbanim once they gain *semichah*?**

After completing the program, our *yungeleit* receive a prestigious *semichah*, both from my grandfather, the *Rosh Yeshivah*, and from Harav Heinemann.

As to what they do next, there is no single answer. Each individual takes what he has learned and utilizes it for what best suits his abilities and his inclinations. Many become Rabbanim and some continue to learn and eventually get a position as a *maggid shiur*, *Dayan*, or *Rosh Yeshivah*. There are others who enter various fields of education or social work, and there are some who enter the workforce where they *psaken* for themselves, their families and their co-workers, and may also serve in their communities in various capacities such as dating coaches, *shalom bayis* coaches and *chassan* Rebbees.

Although KHA is frequently dubbed a “*semichah kollel*,” I prefer to regard it as a *kollel* that creates leaders. Whatever path he later chooses in life, a person who learns in our *kollel* will emerge not only with a broad knowledge and a deep understanding of *halachah*, but also with the ability and confidence to provide his own special leadership to *Klal Yisrael* in whatever area that may be.

For more information on the Kollel Hora'ah of America, please contact Rabbi Eisenberg at 732-610-7186 or Rabbi Goldstein at 732-573-5370.