

# A Kollel Comes to Philadelphia

by F. Levy

Enter the small, second-story office space in suburban Philadelphia, on any given morning, and you can hear *yungerleit* sitting in small groups studying and reviewing *Maseches Shabbos*. In the afternoon, the words of *Hilchos Shabbos Halachah Le'maisa* can be heard. Return to that same room at night, or on a Sunday morning, and the men are joined by members of the community who are seeking to increase their level of knowledge in Torah, *Talmud*, and *Halachah*.

This is what is happening every day at the Philadelphia Community Kollel in Bala Cynwyd. Since its opening two months ago, people of varied backgrounds and learning experience are coming to hear the words of *Hashem* and learn about their heritage. They come for the evening *shiurim*, the Sunday morning *Bais Medrash* program and to learn one-on-one with the Kollel's *yungerleit*.

"Things are literally taking off," said Rabbi Yitzchok Weinberger, one of the *Roshei Kollel*. "We've had to expand the space in the *Bais Medrash*. We've already taken down one wall and we hope to take down another," in order to add more space. "*Baruch Hashem*, it's successful. More than we thought." He noted that on a recent Thursday evening, chairs had to be brought up from a glatt-kosher restaurant located beneath the Kollel to accommodate all those who turned out for the evening *shiur*.

Rabbi Yechiel Biberfeld, who also serves as *Rosh Kollel* at the institution, echoed his colleague's comments. "Just in the few weeks that we've been here, we've seen, *Baruch Hashem*, hundreds of people from the community come through the doors and take advantage of the opportunity to learn with Kollel members."

The Kollel has a staff of seven, which makes it easier to offer individualized lessons to those who

come to the learning center. According to Rabbi Biberfeld, "The main goal is that the *yungerleit* should grow in their own learning, as well as disseminate authentic Torah learning to the Jews of the greater Philadelphia area. With that in mind, we've chosen individuals and their families who are capable" of fulfilling that goal.

raising the level of learning in our community and fostering *achdus*."

Kollel administrators will also keep their eyes and ears open to the needs of the community and work to fill those needs, with programs like women's classes and a program for school-aged boys. To that end, the Kollel is hoping to offer a summer program for boys

After that, funding was secured for the Kollel and Rabbi Halperin began looking for the *Roshei Kollel*. He noted that between the first board meeting and the opening, there were some ups and downs, but that the end result was worth the difficulties.

"If one goes through a struggle, one should know that there may be hard times planting the

Shmuel Kaminetsky, *shlita*, who have given their *bracha* of tremendous *hatzlacha* on the new undertaking.

For Dr. Brad Somer, a community member who attends the Kollel's *Bais Medrash* program and also learns one-on-one with the *yungerleit* there, the Kollel "is part of a necessary strategic expansion of the community, as a modality for people to get an education, who would not otherwise have an opportunity."

He continued, "I see it as a potential for drawing new people to the community, drawing new business to the community," and encouraging those already in the community to stay. "I think the people there are very talented. I think it's a place to go to further [one's] education."

The Philadelphia Community Kollel's inaugural event was held on Wednesday, May 31, at Lower Merion Synagogue in Bala Cynwyd. Some 400 people from throughout the area, including many of the *rabbanim* from the community and the Philadelphia Yeshiva, were in attendance. The Kollel was especially honored by the presence of Rav Shmuel Kaminetsky, who has been involved in the Kollel at every stage.

According to Rabbi Weinberger, the event was held in memory of Arthur Morgenstern, a local lawyer who "retired at age 50 to devote himself to Torah, *avodah*, and *gemilus chasadim*." The lecture was sponsored by members of the community who wanted to honor his memory. Rabbi Weinberger said, noting that the *shiva* for Arthur Morgenstern ended the same day as the event. Members of the Morgenstern family were also in attendance.

Rav Mattisyahu Salamon, the  *mashgiach* of Bais Medrash Govoah, was the keynote speaker. Addressing those who gathered, Rav Salamon said, "It is truly, for me, a great pleasure, a wonderful *simcha* to take part in this gathering, a gathering of people who come together for no other purpose than to give *kavod* to Torah."

"I will call it—in this day and age, and particularly in this time of year [during *Sefiras Haomer*—a minor *Har Sinai*, in [that] we're all standing here in awe and respect, in anticipation of receiving the Torah from *Hashem Yisborach*," Rav Salamon continued.

The *Mashgiach* explained that the Torah says we should never forget what we saw on *Har Sinai*. "And what did we see? And why is it so important to give over what we saw before and what we heard before *Matan Torah*?" He said that before receiving the Torah, *B'nai Yisrael* saw a mountain burning with fire, the thick, dark smoke reaching up to the sky. The sound of the *shofar* grew louder by the moment. There was thunder and lightning,



Yungeleit learning in the new Philadelphia Kollel.

"*Torah lishma* has been learned in the Philadelphia Yeshiva for nearly 50 years. The *yungerleit* are *lomdei torah* and *talmidei chachomim*. Their combined *koach hatorah* has brought us tremendous *hatzlacha* so far," added Rabbi Weinberger. Though the majority of classes are being held at the Kollel building, members of the Kollel plan to teach classes at other sites as well. In fact, a class on *Orchos HaTzadikim* is given by Rabbi Dovid Weinberg each Wednesday night at Congregation Beth Hamedrosh of Overbrook Park, and women's monthly and weekly *shiurim* are currently being held in private homes in the greater Philadelphia area.

The Kollel will do more than just offer classes, said Rabbi Weinberger. "We've got seven families who moved in. They will be active in the Jewish community, in *Bikur Cholim*, in the schools; they will get involved in community organizations here. These people have moved from Lakewood to help the community continue growing."

Dr. David Epstein, a prominent physician in the community, shared the *Roshei Kollel*'s excitement. "Since the Kollel opened its doors a couple of months ago, we now have a place in town where people can go any night of the week to attend a *shiur* or learn *b'chavrusa*. It's a very exciting development for our community, and it really brings all the segments of the community together. The Kollel will have a dramatic impact by

in grades six through eight who might otherwise have nothing to do over the school break. "Giving teenaged boys—a constructive day is the difference between a kid going up or down" in life, said Rabbi Weinberger, adding that the program "will lead to an *aliyah* in *ruchnius*." As for women's programs, some 30 women turned out for the launch of a *Rosh Chodesh* program, and a weekly class for women has also been established. A July 4<sup>th</sup> *Yom Iyun* program drew 100 men, women and children.

The *Roshei Kollel* are in contact with the tremendous resource of the *Roshei Yeshiva* of the Philadelphia Yeshiva. Rav Shmuel Kaminetsky, has spent countless hours guiding the *Roshei Kollel*, and Rav Elya Svei has given crucial advice on a number of key issues.

The Philadelphia Community Kollel has been a dream for Philadelphia for many years. Several community members attempted to create a Kollel more than 10 years ago. Two years ago, with the help of Rabbi Dovid Halperin, who now serves as *Rosh Chaburah* of the Kollel, the community once again began laying the groundwork for a Kollel.

Rabbi Halperin said that one of the reasons intermarriage is high in the area is the lack of Jewish education and identification, and by making the Torah more accessible through the Kollel, "[we] can give [people] more identification with Judaism."

In March, 1998, the Kollel hosted its first board meeting.

seeds; however, if he does it for sake of *Hashem*'s children, *Hashem* will give him the strength to bring it to fruition," Rabbi Halperin said.

Rabbi Biberfeld, a *talmid* of Rabbi Levi Dicker in *Mercat Har Torah* of Belle Harbor, the *Mir Yeshiva*, and *Bais Medrash Govoah* of Lakewood, and who was serving as a *Rosh Chaburah* in the Lakewood Yeshiva, was hired over the winter. Rabbi Weinberger is a veteran of the community kollel scene, having spent five years learning in the Miami Community Kollel. He also learned in Yeshiva Torah Temimah and at the yeshiva of Rav Dovid Halevi Soloveitchik: Rabbi Halperin, who has lived in Philadelphia for four years, was previously learning in *Bais Medrash Govoah* of Lakewood, and Yeshiva Ateret Yisroel in Yerushalayim, where he was a *talmid* of Rabbi Dovid Cohen (presently of *Chevron Yeshiva*). Four additional *yungerleit* from Lakewood—Rabbi Avraham Green, Rabbi Dovid Irons, Rabbi Dovid Weinberg, and Rabbi Yoel Dovid Zeffren—are also part of the kollel.

A group of dedicated *baalei batim* from the community committed themselves to establishing the Kollel, whose funding comes from local residents. "We also received a sizable grant from the Wolfson Foundation," according to Rabbi Weinberger. Among those who were very supportive of the venture were the *Roshei Yeshiva* of the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia, Harav Elya Svei, *shlita*, and Harav

noting that "the development of kollelim in our time, is something that defies nature. If you spoke of it 20 years ago, people would say, 'You're crazy.' Fifty years ago, people would say, 'You're insane.'"

Rabbi Leib Klein, a Lakewood resident who came for the dedication program, said the rise of the Kollel movement shows that Jews have not just survived, but endured and thrived. He noted that the idea of having a place where people can come to learn, not necessarily to become a rabbi, but simply to gain knowledge about Torah, *halacha*, and *mitzvos*, originated with Rav Aharon Kotler. "He wanted a place to learn for the sake of

learning itself. At the time [he had] many cynics.—[But] history has shown he was successful beyond his expectations."

As for the Philadelphia Community Kollel, Klein said, "I'm not a Philadelphian, but I was very excited at the turnout—people from different backgrounds. It bodes well for the success of the Kollel that the community [is] interested and came forward."

The Kollel has become an active community organization in the short time it has been here, and *be'ezras Hashem*, it will be another stepping stone towards the time when all Jews will follow in the derech of Torah and *mitzvos* and merit the coming of *Moshiach*.

## PHILADELPHIA

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and the mountain itself trembled. Then the mountain rose over heads of *B'nai Yisrael*. "This is not a parable," he told the audience. "It all happened so that we should never forget—that every word is *min hashomayim*."

He said that each generation needs to have its own *matan Torah*, "something in front of our eyes, something we can connect to our own times." In our time, he said, the "*matan Torah*" is the rise of kollelim across America.

Out of the ashes of the Holocaust, kollelim and Jewish education have flourished in America. "Isn't that part of *ma'amod Har Sinai*?" the *Mashgiach* asked,