

by Yaakov Branfman

Anytown, Anywhere, 5766

We'll call him Shlomo, but his name could be anything, and he can be found anywhere where Jews are. Shlomo comes from a sincere, religious family. He attended day school and *yeshivah ketanah*, succeeding in his studies.

Every now and then, for a change of pace, Shlomo would go to daven at the *shtiebel* down the street from the yeshivah. This *shtiebel* was presided over by a *chassidische* rebbe endowed with enormous warmth and *ahavas Yisrael*, the love of every Jew, which spilled over into the *kehillah* in a wonderful way. Shlomo had never encountered anything like it in his life. He was amazed, both at the similarities and at the enormous differences from the *avodah*, the ways of serving Hashem, to which he was accustomed.

What impressed him the most was the emphasis on *simchah*, joy, evenly balanced with sincerity and respect. Shlomo was a true *ben Torah*, a true Torah student, who had absorbed the Torah's teachings, and he began to wonder if perhaps there was more to serving Hashem than he'd realized. Perplexed by this new vista, yet charged with a willingness to grow and to develop in Torah, he found himself at an impasse. How could he incorporate his new perspective into his life? Where could he find the King's path?

Baltimore to Jerusalem, 5736

Rabbi Baruch Gartner was born in Baltimore, forty-seven years ago. Just like Shlomo, he seemed content in his surroundings, as yet unaware of the yearning that was stirring inside of him. At age twenty, Rabbi Gartner began to realize that he was ready for further growth in Torah, and traveled to Eretz Yisrael. While in yeshivah, he found himself compelled to try and create an atmosphere of joy among the *bochurim*. It was a hard task that he set for himself. Like Shlomo, he felt he needed more, but, unlike Shlomo, he was ready and willing to act.

"Soon after I came to Eretz Yisrael, I used to go on Shabbos to places like Meron. There's nowhere like Meron in Baltimore! I'd daven with the chasidim, go to people's houses. While I was there, I would experience such *simchah*," says Rabbi Gartner. "I would return to yeshivah and feel let >>>

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Searching for the KING'S PATH

Rabbi Baruch Gartner (r.) together with Rabbi Shmuel Zucker, Maggid Shiur in Yeshivas Derech HaMelech



Rav Moshe Wolfson

Mashgiach, Torah v'Daas, and Rav of Kehilas Emunas Yisrael, Boro Park

There are great plans for this yeshivah. I have known personally, for many years, the people who are in charge. They can help you transform it into a source of *sas-son v'simchah b'moadon Torah*, rejoicing in a place of Torah, to be a pride for *knesses Yisrael*, and a pride for the Ribono shel Olam.



Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg

Rosh Chabura of Kehillas Nachalas Yaakov, Yerushalayim

The *gevaldige* things that are going to come out from this yeshivah will all be to the credit of the founders.

In business, the first few investors start out with so little, but when the business grows, they become millionaires. So it is in *ruchniyus*, spiritual matters. The first *bochurim*, the first *maggidei shiur*, the first *mashpi'im*, those who inspire the boys, will begin, and then watch the yeshivah grow bigger and bigger. After the hundreds and hundreds of hours of Torah learning, Hashem will still remember who the founders were, and will keep giving them reward for it. Hashem knows exactly how much time, effort, and *koiach*, strength, each person invests, and He continues giving reward for it.

down, like something was missing. I couldn't reconcile myself to the fact that the Torah could only be learned, and not *lived*. I longed for a seven-day-a-week atmosphere that would be similar to what I experienced on Shabbos."

Fast Forward Married at twenty-three, Reb Baruch began what became an astounding career in *safrus*, as a scribe writing holy scrolls. Widely considered an "exclusive" *sofer*, his tefillin *parshiyos* were highly valued and frequently commissioned by Torah leaders. He also developed unique methods of teaching this skill, and many well-respected scribes have learned from him.

Life was proceeding smoothly. With a successful career in a sacred field, Rabbi Gartner was just beginning to marry off his children and see *nachas* from them.

Then Rabbi Gartner met Shlomo. This fateful encounter took place after years of listening to Nachman, Eliyahu, Yosef; Yehuda, Meir, and Shaul etc. Good boys from strong backgrounds, one after another they expressed their confusion and dismay at feeling blocked, unable to snap all the pieces of their service of Hashem together into one big picture. "I was constantly coming into contact with these young men, so much like myself at their age, who were drawn towards a very spiritual and deep approach to Torah, emphasizing davening and learning with fire, with *brenn*," he says.

"I tried so hard to fill the vacuum for them, to connect them with *tzadikim* and with *rabbanim* who spoke English and understood their mentality. But these *rabbanim* were already in tremendous demand by their Yiddish-speaking adherents, and had to make themselves available to their *talmidim*, and chassidim, along with their intense learning schedules. It just wasn't enough for these boys."

"I begged Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg and Rav Mordechai Zilber to come speak to these boys in English, but they were concerned that their English wasn't good enough, that it would have the opposite effect from what was intended. I said to them, 'You *must!* You have to! It doesn't matter how you sound. Your *being* is what they want and need. Your Torah. Your personality.' Both of these *tzad-*



Rabbi Shmuel Rosenbaum giving a shiur.

dikim hesitated, but I just kept asking them until they finally agreed."

The *bochurim* and young *avreichim* "tasted of" these talks, and it whet their appetite for more. They asked Rabbi Gartner to help them find that "seven-day-a-week atmosphere" for which Reb Baruch himself had spent so many years searching.

Unable to turn a deaf ear, he did the unexpected. He put down his writing tools and, with nothing to go on but a dream, he began to build a yeshivah.

Many have attempted to build yeshivos, with varying results. The question in this case is *how*. How did Reb Baruch Gartner manage to interest some of the greatest Torah lights of our generation - Rav Moshe Wolfson, Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg, Rav Osher Weiss, and Rav Moshe Weinberger - to join forces with him?

"If Only ... " "When I reached the point where I felt that starting a yeshivah was an absolute necessity, I

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talked with Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg about it. He questioned me rigorously on why this yeshivah was necessary. He was worried about my leaving *safrus*. In his opinion, my *parshiyos* were important. And he also knew the difficulties in running a yeshivah. He didn't want me to lose the merit that I have from the *parshiyos* and jeopardize my learning and davening for something unless it was really necessary. He asked me why I had to do this. "

Rabbi Gartner hesitated a moment before continuing. "I answered, 'Do you know that there are boys who are not just a little bit dissatisfied? Do you know that there are boys who literally

leave Yiddishkeit because they don't find their home in the yeshivah? They don't see a future for themselves there. There's a gap here, a hole in *klal Yisrael* for English-speaking people who have a leaning towards the warmth of Chassidus. They're not Karliners, they're not Breslov, and they're not Chabad. They don't speak Yiddish and they don't even speak Hebrew. It's not their mentality, it's not their culture. There's a big demand, and so few are filling it. It's been going on for too many years. There *are* rebbeim who are giving classes, and there are places that function on Shabbos, but there's no yeshivah.'

"I said, 'If only ... '

"That week I received a call from Rav Mottel Zilber. He said, 'I want to talk to you. There are people who want to start a new yeshivah, and I want you to be involved.'

"That was the beginning."

What happened then?

"I called Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg to ask him to be part of it, and explained to him about the phenomenon of young men who, if they didn't find themselves in an environment that was suitable for them, could become disaffected. He said to me, 'You have to start it! If there's one Jew who's going to become disaffected, then I can see why it's necessary.'

"Rav Zilberberg asked me, 'What's the loss to the Jewish people? How many pairs of tefillin are they going to lose through this deal?' He asked me how many hours I would continue to write and how many pairs of tefillin I produce. He wanted to know exactly what would be lost. In the end, we reached an agreement.

"He told me to study the life of Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, to understand who he was. I understood from this that he wanted the yeshivah to be like Torah V'Daas. So I started reading the biography of Rav Mendlowitz."

What did you learn from it?

"You can't encompass such a man in one phrase. But one of the things that stuck out in my mind very clearly was that he was the type of person who was always trying to figure out how to make the yeshivah better. I related to that because that's what brought me my success in writing tefillin. I've never stopped trying to improve my work. I'm always listening, figuring out, experimenting.

"Until his last day, Rav Shraga Feivel was continually asking himself, 'How can I make Torah V'Daas better?' He was always thinking about it. I learned that from him. I try to create the best environment and atmosphere for the *bochurim* so that they can learn with a clear head.

But still, you were a highly successful person. How did you finally decide to give it up?

"I just couldn't see myself finishing out my life like this. I felt I had so much more potential, so much more to give. I've made 'perfect' tefillin, and now I want to make a perfect yeshivah. I want >>>



Rav Asher Weiss

Av Beis Din Darchei Hora'a, Yerushalayim

I've been asked many times what I see in this yeshiva that is different from others. What is unique about this institution? What is unique is its holistic approach to the spiritual needs of its talmidim. It is our mission, and our hope, to give our talmidim the highest level in learning, to produce talmidei chachamim, together with the warmth of chassidus, and the warmth of musar. What we need is not only Torah knowledge, but the depth and warmth of avodas Hashem, and the beauty of middos tovos.



Rav Mordechai Zilber

Rav of Kehilas Toldos Yehuda - Stutchin, Boro Park

Hashem should help that the talmidim should derive kedushah in avodas Hashem, the service of G-d, in a way that should fulfill the verse, "Yismach Hashem b'maasav, G-d should rejoice in His works."



Rabbi Avraham Twersky

Founder of Gateway Rehabilitation Center, Pittsburgh

This yeshiva gives everybody an opportunity "I'aalos sulam mutz'av artzah v'rosho magiah haShamaymah to ascend that ladder which is planted on the ground, with its top in Heaven."

to build on other good yeshivos, ideas they have, and adapt them to the needs of this special group of students."

What kind of *siyata d'Shmaya* have you seen in the coming together of the yeshivah?

"When Rav Tzvi Meir told me about Rav Shraga Feivel, he also said, 'When you want success, you have to go to successful people. Rav Shraga Feivel was a role model for that. But there are also living successful people. I want you to go to Rav Moshe Weinberger in New York. He is successful. He's worked wonders, and you'll have to involve him.'

"So I called him up. Rabbi Weinberger is very busy, but he called me back the same night. I tried to quickly fill him in on the momentous series of events that had led up to this conversation. I said, 'It's a great honor to talk with you. I really don't know you so well, but I know you through your tapes and it's a great honor to talk with the one I hear on the tapes.'

"He said, 'It's an honor?! I'm embarrassed to talk to you. Because you're doing what I've been talking about for twenty-five years. For twenty-five years, all I've been doing is talking. And you're doing it!'

"He invited me to come to America to meet with him and begin the yeshivah. I came with my plan. He said, 'Very nice. But you're missing the most important ingredient. The Jewish people have been waiting many years for this yeshivah. We have an obligation to create a place of Torah that will be imbued with the teachings of the students of the Baal Shem Tov, together with an uncompromising program that will ensure the highest-level achievements in Gemara studies. Most importantly we must find an *adam gadol*, a great man, who personifies the best of these worlds. You need to ask Rav Asher Weiss to become the *rosh yeshivah*.'

"I was flabbergasted. At that point, we were talking about a new yeshivah, one with no students! And Rabbi Weinberger was telling me to ask one of the most important Talmudic scholars of the Jewish people to join forces with us to build the yeshivah.

"To my amazement, Rav Asher agreed. When I first went to him, he chided me for being a dreamer, but he liked the idea. The *rosh yeshivah* met with some of the people who were in-



Rabbi Baruch Gartner learning with a talmid.

involved, and he said, 'You have something special. I'd like to be part of it.'

The Yeshivah that Didn't Exist

"After that, we started to see amazing help from Above. We started with an idea. No building, no students, no *shtenders*. Amazingly, people still expressed interest in trying to help.

"There were some pioneering young men who were prepared to put themselves into a yeshivah that didn't exist. We have seen a lot of Divine help in the quality of boys that we have. One boy said to me, 'I've been waiting my whole life for this yeshivah, and I'm so happy that it's happening.' They pinch themselves; they think they're living in a dream.

"We started to build. We went to Rav Shmuel Rosenbaum, who was the

There's a gap here, a hole in Klal Yisrael, for English-speaking people who have a leaning towards the warmth of Chassidus.

halachic ruler for Rav Moshe Wolfson's community before he left America, and the head of the Nezer HaTorah kollel, and asked him to join the yeshivah. He was excited by the opportunity. 'This has to happen!' he encouraged us.

"From the day we opened, there was a real yeshivah, with a full study hall, a full schedule of classes conducted by master educators and *roshei yeshivah* in every study division. Everything happened right away: the spirited davening and the intense, ani-

mated, learning for which we'd all been searching. A great thirst was finally being quenched. At the end of that day, many shared the feeling that not only had the yeshivah's time come, but that it seemed as if it had always existed.

"It's a different approach," says Rabbi Gartner. "Our motto is, 'A new spirit in Torah learning.' The Torah and davening are inseparable. In order to daven, you have to have an open heart. Learning before davening helps to accomplish that.



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger

Let's Move Forward

The name of this unique yeshivah is **Derech HaMelech**. I asked Reb Baruch how they chose the name. "Rabbi Weinberger and I were discussing it. Many people know of the Rav's shul in Woodmere, one of Long Island's Five Towns, which is called Aish Kodesh, after the Piaseczne Rebbe. I had assumed we'd call the yeshivah something along the lines of Aish Kodesh East, but Rav Weinberger disagreed. 'Let's move forward,' he said. 'Let's name the yeshiva Derech HaMelech, after the remarkable sefer written by that tzaddik before the darkness of the Holocaust descended upon his world to destroy the yeshivah that he had built. We'll build upon the ruins and continue where the Piaseczne left off.'"

"Several of the staff have said to me, 'I had a fixed idea in my mind how the yeshivah was going to turn out. I thought it would be good. But it's much, much greater than I imagined.' It's inspiring to be teaching here. The students' thirst inspires all of us."

How do you see your future?

"I'm happy with the yeshiva as it is now, but not complacent. I think it's inevitable that we'll be growing, as more people see what we have here. In the past, I saw that the path I was on wasn't bringing me to my deepest happiness, and I learned through that experience to listen to my inner voice and inner convictions. I'm going to continue on that path, searching for ways to make it better for all of us, both in the yeshivah and for the Jewish people." ■