

## AROUND THE FIVE TOWNS

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### In Search Of The King: Derech HaMelech

By Bassi Gruen

It was Rav Weinberger's Aish Kodesh shul in Woodmere that first gave Daniel Sussman a glimpse into another world—a world in which Judaism is not a burden or something to be taken care of so one could get on with life, but in which Judaism is, rather, life itself and striving to connect with one's Creator is the ultimate goal. "Aish Kodesh and Rav Weinberger totally changed my perspective," says Daniel. "It had a profound influence on my years in high school."

Daniel graduated, and he elected to spend the next year studying in Israel. He was learning well, in a serious yeshiva. But something was missing. The intensity and the joy he had known back in Aish Kodesh were absent. Seeking to inhale the rarified atmosphere he had known there, Daniel found himself drawn to Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg's shul. Rav Tzvi Meir had spoken at Aish Kodesh. "I had wandered into the *shiur* almost by mistake," Daniel relates, "but I remember being struck by both Rav Tzvi Meir's words and his actions. Even if I would not have understood a word he said, just watching him—his energy and his passion—made a deep impression."

In Rav Tzvi Meir's shul, Daniel found the environment that he was seeking. It was there, too, that he met Rav Baruch Gartner, a man who was soon to change his life. Rav Gartner knew all about the

atmosphere Daniel craved. Years ago, when he was a young *bachur* in Eretz Yisrael, he had often experienced deeply moving Shabbosos. He would return to yeshiva full of inspiration, only to feel let down on Sunday. His yeshiva didn't offer the same soul food that nourished him over Shabbos—the excitement of *davening*, the warmth of *chassidus*, the focus on the internal aspects of *Yiddishkeit*. And he would wonder, Couldn't a place be created that would offer the joy of such Shabbosos seven days a week?

Rav Gartner married and became a skilled and highly sought-after *sofer*. It was on Shabbos that he would meet them, the "Daniel's" who were asking the same question that had troubled them years before, hungry for a yeshiva that would touch them on every level. One day, Rav Gartner decided to put aside his quill and devote his life to creating living *sifrei Torah*.

Rav Gartner turned to Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg, who gave the project his support and *berachah*. He sent Rav Gartner across the ocean to involve Rav Moshe Weinberger and to observe his Aish Kodesh community in Woodmere. It was Rav Weinberger who suggested asking the renowned *gaon* and *posek* Rav Asher Weiss to accept the post of *rosh yeshiva*. To Rav Gartner's delight, Rav Weiss accepted.

Finding the boys was an easier task. There were so many boys who had been looking for precisely that which Rav Gartner had created. They hailed from widely differing backgrounds: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, every stripe of *chassidus*, and every type of head cov-

ering. They wore khakis, long jackets, and everything in between. One aspect united them all—sincerity.

This yeshiva took the threads of Daniel's spiritual longings—Aish Kodesh, Rav Tzvi Meir, serious learning, intense *tefillah*, and striving students—and wove them into a unique yeshiva. But Daniel was torn; part of him wanted to jump at this incredible opportunity, to spend all his waking hours in the atmosphere he had come to love. The other part feared moving too fast. He stayed in his old yeshiva and watched the new one from the sidelines. To his amazement, the yeshiva turned out to be all that it had promised to be. By Pesach, he was ready to take the plunge.

He never regretted it.

He loves the *shiurim*. "The learning is challenging," he relates. "There are definite expectations, and you have to work to achieve; the material is never spoon-fed. And when your learning is the result of your own hard work, there is a tremendous sense of accomplishment."

He loves the staff, the outstanding individuals that Rav Gartner has brought together to lead his students. "The *rebbeim* are all so caring; we can approach any of them with anything that's on our minds. They make themselves fully available to the *bachurim*." And he loves his fellow students. "There's an incredible sense of camaraderie," he says. "The yeshiva almost feels like a family. Everyone truly cares."

Rav Gartner himself has been astonished to watch Derech HaMelech develop a life of its own. "At first we just had a theoretical blueprint—cre-

ate a warm yeshiva which focuses on *avodas Hashem* and which treats each *bachur* as an individual. We could only hope it would work. The reality is even better than my original dream."

Building on this year's success, the yeshiva plans to offer an intensive *semichah* program this Elul. The program, which will be led by the *rosh kollel* Rav Shmuel Rosenbaum, will span three years—one year devoted to *hilchos Shabbos*, one to *hilchos kashrus*, and a third to family purity, Yom Tov, and miscellaneous *halachos*. The mornings will be spent learning, in depth, the Gemara(s) covering the *halachic* topics to be studied in the afternoon. The goal is not to memorize *p'sakim*, but to understand them from the source and to give the students the tools to tackle any area of *halachah*. Practicality will be emphasized—if *hilchos esrog* is the current topic, *esrogim* will be brought in for examination, giving the students hands-on experience.

"I feel that a program like this has two major advantages," says Rav Rosenbaum. "First, analyzing how the *halachah* is derived from the original sources helps hone students' analytical abilities. Second, by bringing learning into the realm of day-to-day living, the students see the relevancy of their learning and this helps them retain what they learn. When I ran a *semichah* program in another yeshiva, the *maggidei shiur* told me that the boys in the *semichah* program were the most motivated in the *shiur*."

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Derech HaMelech is a most suitable name for this unique institution. The Mishnah speaks of the *derech ha'melech*, the path that the king takes. A king and his entourage are allowed to go anywhere they please, breaking down all barriers. Derech HaMelech is also breaking down barriers—the barriers that are dividing Klal Yisrael.

They are also breaking down internal barriers, those which block young men from a closer connection to their Father in heaven. “The essential point of Derech HaMelech is not to cram your mind with information,” says Daniel. “It’s to become the best *eved Hashem* you possibly can be.” A worthy goal indeed.

To learn more about this exciting new yeshiva, please e-mail [info@derech-hamelech.org](mailto:info@derech-hamelech.org), visit [www.derechhamelech.org](http://www.derechhamelech.org), call 972-57-311-6036, or write to Yeshivas Derech HaMelech, Baal Shem Tov 7, Jerusalem, Israel. ♦