

It all started with a dream nurtured for two-and-a-half decades. When R. Baruch Gartner learned in yeshiva in Israel, he often experienced deeply moving *Shabbatot*. 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*. Could a place not be created which would offer the joy of such *Shabbatot* seven days a week?

R. Gartner married and became a skilled and highly sought-after *sofer*. It was on *Shabbos* that he would meet them – the boys asking the same question that had haunted him years before, hungry for a yeshiva which would touch them on every level. One day, R. Gartner decided to put aside his quill and devote his life to creating living Torahs. He opened Yeshivat Derech HaMelech.

He had the backing of many prominent *rabbanim*. R. Tzvi Meir Zilberberg gave the yeshiva his support and steered R. Gartner towards Rav Moshe Weinberger of the Aish Kodesh community in Woodmere, N.Y., who became intimately involved in putting together the staff. R. Weinberger suggested asking Rav Asher Weiss to take the post of *rosh yeshiva*, and he happily accepted. Working on a tight schedule and even tighter budget, R. Gartner obtained the bare essentials, and Derech HaMelech opened its doors.

The students who came were looking for precisely that which R. Gartner had created. They hailed from widely differing backgrounds – boys with short *peyos*, curled *peyos*, and no visible *peyos*. They wore khakis, long jackets, and everything in between. One aspect united them all – sincerity.

"My former yeshiva was very learning orientated," relates Yaakov, one of the early students. "I was looking for something with more of a focus on *avodah*, on building a relationship with *Hashem*. I didn't just want to do *mitzvos* as a side element to my learning, but to enjoy them and use them as an opportunity for connection with my Creator. I wanted to spend more time on *tefillah*. I had been a frequent *Shabbos* guest at R. Gartner's home. Seeing the way he ran his home, I thought he

could provide me with what I was looking for."

Did the yeshiva deliver what it had promised? Yaakov answers with a resounding YES. He appreciates the camaraderie between the students. Despite their widely differing backgrounds, the fact that they have similar aspirations creates a wonderful atmosphere.



Shown at left, R. Gartner; at right, R. Rosenbaum.

He enjoys the long *davening* and the weekly class in *Chovos Halevavos*, which touches the soul, not just the mind. He's become extremely close with R. Shmuel Rosenbaum, who teaches the highest-level class. "R. Rosenbaum is extraordinary in his ability to boost people," says Yaakov. "I've had tremendous growth in my learning since I came here, mainly because of his encouragement and confidence in me."

R. Rosenbaum, who has served as a *posek* for decades and has given *semichah* classes for many years, is the mastermind behind the yeshiva's innovative plans for the upcoming school year. Derech HaMelech plans to open a three-year *semichah* program in English, one which will help create the next generation of rabbis, *poskim* and knowledgeable laymen. The afternoon will be devoted to *halacha*, while mornings will be spent learning in depth the *Gemara* passages covering those same topics. Practicality will be emphasized, and the students will receive hands-on experience.

"I feel that a program like this has two major advantages," says R. Rosenbaum. "First, seeing how

the *halacha* 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."

R. Gartner, who is the yeshiva's *mashgiach*, feels that this program can do wonders for particular boys. "Not everyone can spend endless time on a single line of *Gemara*," he explains. "This program will show the flow of *halacha* through the ages, and give the students the fulfillment of seeing the whole picture."

Derech HaMelech is the perfect setting for such a program. R. Gartner has been astonished to watch it develop a life of its own. "At first we just had a theoretical blueprint – create 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.

"One of our first students very much wanted to be a part of the yeshiva. However, we discovered that he was academically weak and had a number of medical issues as well. I spent quite a bit of time in doctors' offices with him that first month. We gave him lots of love and attention. To our amazement and joy, today, nine months later, he's flying – eating up pages of *Gemara*, and in excellent health. He came to me with tears in his eyes before our Pesach break. 'This wasn't just the best *zman* of my life,' he said, 'it was the best time of my life.'"

What challenges does R. Gartner face? "The biggest challenge is living up to what we set out to do. We jumped in with a promise of excellence – we would have high-level learning, a connection with the *tzaddikim* of our time, regular inspiration. The challenge is to deliver all that. The boys come in expecting to be transformed into angels, and we have to help them reach for the stars."

And that's precisely what they do.

To be a part of this exciting new yeshiva, e-mail: info@derechhamelech.org; Website: www.derechhamelech.org; Phone: (972) 57- 311-6036; Address: Yeshivat Derech HaMelech, Baal Shem Tov 7, Jerusalem, Israel. ■