

Kollel in Ramot – A Crowning Achievement

Rabbi Nisson Wolpin

The Kollel Phenomenon

One of the most noteworthy achievements of the post-World War II era is the phenomenal growth of Torah in America, particularly the founding and development of *Kollelim* both in this country and on an international scale.

When the *Gaon* Rav Aharon Kotler זצ"ל arrived in America in 1940, he became totally involved in *hatzolah* – saving the lives of the remaining Jews in Europe. In 1943, when his further efforts proved fruitless, he focused on founding a *Kollel* – first in Connecticut, then relocated in Lakewood. He contacted Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz זצ"ל, who had founded Aish Dos, an educational institution to train *mechanchim* in Monsey, NY – a Torah Vodaath project, in line with Torah Umesorah. Rav Aharon advised him to transfer Aish Dos to the Torah Vodaath campus in Brooklyn, and to found a *Kollel* – Bais Medrash Elyon – in Monsey, where it would benefit from the isolated rural environment. The results of both efforts were truly phenomenal, and inspired similar efforts in other *yeshivos*. Until then, most leading *Roshei Yeshiva* and *Poskim* had come from Europe. Under the leadership of Rav Aharon and the *Gaon* Rav Reuvain Grozovsky זצ"ל in Monsey, post-*Beis Medrash bachurim* and young married men extended their years of learning under the inspiring guidance and instruction of great *rabbeim* and *chavrusas*. This initiative was soon picked up and emulated in Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin, Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, among others. In the years that followed, America began to produce its own *Gedolim* and Torah leaders.

Today, there are thousands of *yungeleit* – young married men – engaged in advanced Talmudic and Halachic studies, in *Eretz Yisroel*, around the globe, and across the American continent in numerous *Kollelim*, transforming this

country into a home for continually advancing Torah learning.

Focus on Aliyos Shlomo

On our agenda is Kollel Aliyos Shlomo, an English-speaking institution located in the Ramot section of *Yerusholayim*, made up of *chaveirim* who are notably advanced in their learning, having already spent several productive decades of their lives in *Kollel*. Indeed, the Hebrew word "*Kollel*" conveys the concept of being inclusive, comprehensive, and thorough-going in one's involvement in Torah study.

The men of Aliyos Shlomo come from a wide variety of *yeshiva* backgrounds, carrying with them an impressive array of approaches to Talmudic study. A sampling: One senior member learned under Rav Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל in Staten Island, as well as Rav Simcha Schustal זצ"ל in Stamford Connecticut, Rav Zelik Epstein זצ"ל (Shaarei Torah), Rav Abba Berman זצ"ל in Yerusholayim, and Rav Elya Weintraub זצ"ל in Bnei Brak ... Others learned in a variety of settings – under Rav Elya Svei זצ"ל in Philadelphia, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky זצ"ל, Rav Gedalya Schorr זצ"ל, and Rav Elya Chazan זצ"ל in Mesivta Torah Vodaath, Rav Shlomo Freifeld זצ"ל in Far Rockaway, Rav Moshe Eisemann זצ"ל in Vineland NJ, Rav Shimshon Pincus זצ"ל in Ofakim, Rav Nochum Partzovitz זצ"ל and Rav Chaim Shmulevitz זצ"ל in Mir, and שליט"א Rav Dovid Soloveitchik יבדלח"ט in Brisk/Yerusholayim.

Many of the *Kollel* members devote their afternoons to learning in other structured environments. Some teach Torah to others: For example, one has been saying a *shiur* in *Kadoshim* for *baale battim* in Ramot for over a decade. Another is a *shoel umeishiv* (active consultant in Talmudic studies) in an American *yeshiva*

in Yerusholayim. Periodically, Kollel members share their *chiddushei Torah* with fellow members of the *Kollel*, gaining much from *pilpul chavirim*.

A Personal Note

When the writer of these lines entered the *shidduchim* stage of his life over a half-century ago, there was a quota of ten *yungeleit* per Kollel, in Lakewood as well as in Monsey, which was non-negotiable. After marriage, I spent over a dozen years, dividing my day between *chinuch habbanim* and learning, until some 40 years ago I was invited to edit *The Jewish Observer*, Agudath Israel of America's monthly publication of commentary on contemporary issues and *hashkafa*. (Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky termed it "further involvement in *chinuch* – this time of adults".) I had always yearned to make up

for those years spent outside of a structured *Kollel*, and I find the compensatory experience in Aliyos Shlomo these past two-plus years most gratifying.

The Gaon's Approbation

The Vilna Gaon ז"ל commented that *talmidei chachomim* are the "*lev shel Klal Yisroel*" – the very source of life and energy of the Jewish People. To be sure, these *yungeleit*, who have been dedicating their very selves to absorbing the depths of Torah with vast knowledge, devotion and energy, are the true life force of our nation.

Support of this Kollel is, in my opinion, a most worthwhile investment in the personal growth of established *talmidei chachomim*, raising the standards of *Limud HaTorah* among our people and endowing us all with sacred vitality.