

In Conversation With

Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Rabinowitz

Rav of Congregation Beth Israel,
Malden, Massachusetts

Would the Rav please provide a bit of background information?

I was raised in Elizabeth, New Jersey, where I attended the Jewish Educational Center (J.E.C.) from nursery through eighth grade. Afterwards, I went to the Yeshiva of Philadelphia, where I spent eight years, from high school through *beis medrash*. I was a *talmid* in Mir Yerushalayim for a year, after which I entered Bais Medrash Govoha. There I learned in the *beis medrash* and, after marriage, in its *kollel*. I arrived in Boston in 1992 and learned in the *Kollel* of Greater Boston for close to five years. In 1997, I became Rav of Congregation Beth Israel.

Who has been the biggest influence in your life?

I would say my *Roshei Yeshivah* in Philadelphia, Harav Elya Svei, *zt"l*, and, *ybl"c*, Harav Shmuel Kamenetsky, *shlita*. They gave us a very strong and well-rounded *chinuch* in all areas – in Torah, in *chessed*, in *davening*, in everything.

Their unique contributions had much to do with their individual personalities, and there was much to learn from each one's individual *hanhagah*. When Rav Elya gave a *shiur*, I experienced the fire and passion of Torah. From Rav Shmuel, I learned what true *mentchlichkeit* is as I watched how he dealt with matters that came up daily.

I also had a close *keshet* with the *Mashgiach*, Harav Avrohom Golombeck, *zt"l*. To this day, when certain situations come up and I need guidance, I miss his

presence very much.

After I joined the Boston *Kollel*, the *Roshei Kollel* also had a tremendous influence upon me. Harav Naftoly Bier, *shlita*, who founded the *Kollel*, still serves as *Rosh Kollel*. Harav Yaakov Horowitz, *shlita*, served as *Rosh Kollel* for one year after my arrival; today he is a *Rebbi* in Yeshiva Ohr Hameir of Peekskill. Harav Nochum Eisenstein, *zt"l*, succeeded him as *Rosh Kollel* before becoming Rav of the Forest Park Shul in Lakewood.

From the *Roshei Kollel* I gained a sense of *achrayus* for the *klal* – which, as a *talmid* in Philadelphia, I had also gained. In the Boston *Kollel*, you gain that from learning and dealing with *baalei batim*. Being part of the *Kollel* led me to desire to become a Rav.

How is your shul unique?

To appreciate our uniqueness and accomplishments, it is helpful to know the geographic makeup of Boston's *frum* community. The community is mostly situated in Brighton, a neighborhood in the city of Boston located in Suffolk County, and Brookline, which is actually in Norfolk County but is part of Greater Boston and borders Brighton. Malden, only a 10-minute drive from downtown Boston, is a 25-minute drive from Brookline and Brighton. Malden does not have as many of the amenities common to a *frum* neighborhood as the other two have, but the cost of housing is more affordable in Malden, making it an attractive third option for families.



You ...realize that he has clearly gained from the unique atmosphere that permeates our shul of growing in Yiddishkeit and being accepted and respected for who you are.

Since 1997, when I came to the shul, we have drawn a number of young families and the number of *frum* families has grown. It is still a relatively small shul but, *baruch Hashem*, we are a vibrant, active *kehillah*. We have *minyanim* in the mornings and evenings – something I worked very hard to ensure, to the point of making rounds in my car to pick up people.

In 2004, we constructed an *eruv* under the supervision of Harav Moshe Heinemann, *shlita*, of Baltimore. I direct a team of men that checks the *eruv* on a weekly basis.

The shul has instituted a number of initiatives such as a Home Loan Incentive campaign, whereby the shul lends money towards a down payment to prospective member families looking to purchase a home in the community. We also assist with yeshivah tuition and costs of summer camp.

We hold a communal Shabbos meal every *Shabbos Chazak*. We have a Chanukah *mesibah* and communal Purim *seudah* that draws people from the other neighborhoods. We host guest speakers and educators such as Rabbi Yakov Horowitz from Monsey. Our members gladly volunteer to organize and run these events.

I deliver a number of *shiurim* on *Mishnah*, *parashas hashavua*, *tefillah* and Yamim Tovim. I learn *Gemara b'chavrusa* with a number of people.

I give a *halachah shiur* for women on Shabbos afternoons in the summertime and on Motzoei Shabbos in the winter. We also have learning programs for the children.

What were some of the most memorable events in your kehillah?

The most memorable was certainly when we had the opening of Malden's Mikvah Mayanei Tovah in 2013, a project that was many years in the making and with many challenges. The event drew a large crowd, including many local Rabbanim. The *mikveh* is located in the shul's lower level and is very aesthetically pleasing. The *mikveh* draws people not only from our neighborhood but from outlying areas, such as Cambridge. Everyone is taken care of here with great care and sensitivity.

Another memorable event was the *siyum* we made this past June on *Shishah Sidrei Mishnah*. This was

the culmination of 21 years of learning *Mishnayos* after *Shacharis* each morning. News of this major accomplishment appeared in *Hamodia* this past summer.

Other unforgettable events were the shul's 100th anniversary celebration in 2004 and when my Rebbetzin and I were honored upon our 18th year of leadership of the shul four years ago.

Can you relate any meaningful memories of his interaction with community members?

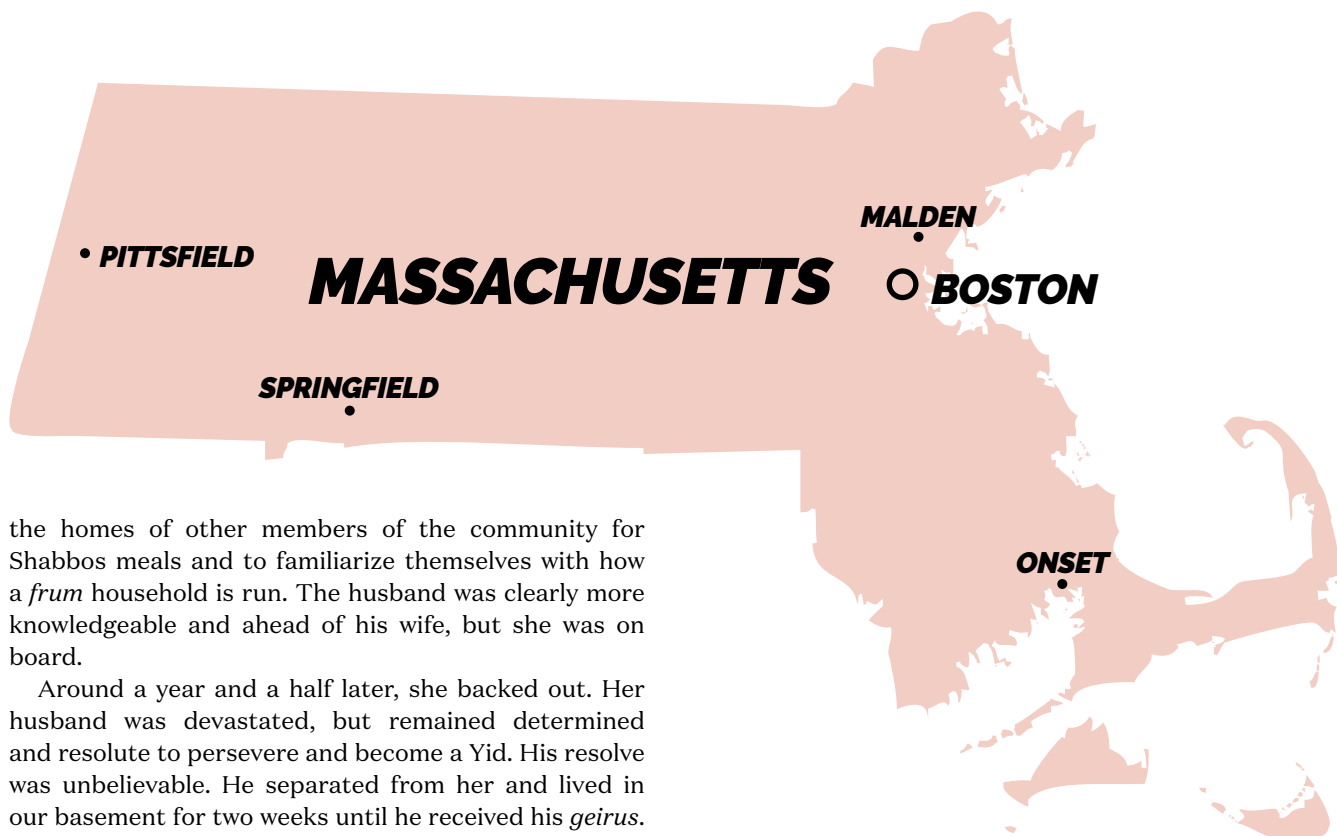
For many years, we have hosted a SEED program here in our community. One year, a woman who came for a Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation video approached me and introduced herself. She was interested in her son participating

in one of the SEED program classes so she sent him to speak with me. On Shabbos afternoon, her son came to my home. It was not a comfortable 15-minute conversation. I didn't know what to make of him. He didn't come back to participate in the SEED program.

A month or two later, this young man appeared in shul – he seemed much calmer. He began coming to shul every Shabbos and Yom Tov for a full year and became integrated in the *kehillah*. He strove to strengthen his ability to read Hebrew and *daven*, skills he had learned in Hebrew school but that had atrophied. He started attending *shiurim* and other shul activities. Within a year, he was learning in a yeshivah. Ultimately, he married and started a family, and he presently learns in a *kollel* in New York. This goes to show that when one is welcoming – and our entire shul in fact accepted him – one sees positive results. His parents are also *frum* today.

Another time, I was contacted about a prospective *ger*, a matter which I did not pursue. I received a text from this individual on Erev Yom Kippur asking if he and his wife could come to my shul on Yom Kippur, to which I responded that they could join. He appeared in shul that Yom Kippur with his wife. She was dressed completely *b'tznius* and I observed how he *davened* the entire day with great feeling. I met him and saw that he was sincere and decided that I had to give him a chance. We spoke at length after Yom Kippur. Realizing clearly that he was serious about converting and living *al pi Torah*, I arranged for them to pursue the requisite learning necessary for their *geirus*.

The couple would frequent our home as well as



the homes of other members of the community for Shabbos meals and to familiarize themselves with how a *frum* household is run. The husband was clearly more knowledgeable and ahead of his wife, but she was on board.

Around a year and a half later, she backed out. Her husband was devastated, but remained determined and resolute to persevere and become a Yid. His resolve was unbelievable. He separated from her and lived in our basement for two weeks until he received his *geirus*. Afterwards, he went to learn in Eretz Yisrael. After four months, he made a *siyum* on *Maseches Megillah*. He is now back in America, continuing his growth in Torah and *yiras Shamayim* while finishing his university training.

There is a sense of satisfaction and *nachas* when you see individual *shteiging* according to their level. You look at a person and realize that he or she has clearly gained from the unique atmosphere that permeates our shul, which fosters growth in *Yiddishkeit* and an attitude of accepting and respecting people for who they are.

Do you mean to say that it is important for people to find their place?

Absolutely. And sometimes families need a certain type of *kehillah* for their growth. Some people would get lost in a large *kehillah* but they find their places in a smaller shul or community. I sometimes tell people that *Klal Yisrael* has always had outposts, places for those who don't live within the *yishuv*, the main community.

A young couple moved here and joined our shul. They became very integrated into our *kehillah* and I learned *b'chavrusa* with the husband. They felt very fulfilled here. When they had to relocate because of a change in employment, they were quite upset, as were we. They had found their place in our community because our community has a place for everyone.

Any advice you can offer to inspiring people's growth?

When all is said and done, the way to be *mashpia* on others is to be a *mentch*, show that you care about them

STATS OF GREATER BOSTON AREA

Shuls: **18**

Yeshiva High Schools: **3**

Bais Yaakov: **1**

Elementary Schools: **4**

Kollet: **1**

Mikvaos: **6**

and are there for them, and respect them for who they are; that opens the channels for them to be motivated to grow. You are there not to be Hashem's policeman, so to speak, but because you genuinely care and want to help them. The care and concern make for a strong connection that enables them to grow and be a source of *nachas* and pride to the *Ribbono shel Olam* and to *Klal Yisrael*.

Thank you, Rabbi Rabinowitz. We wish you much continued hatzlachah in your avodas hakodesh. ■