



Beis medrash learning in Yeshiva of the South.

Shuls in Memphis

Today, there are several Orthodox shuls servicing the frum community.

The Baron Hirsch Synagogue opened in 1884, and at one point was one of the largest Orthodox shuls in America. Congregation Anshe Sphard Beth El Emeth (known as ASBEE) was formed in 1966 as a result of a merger of two older shuls, and the Young Israel of Memphis was formed in 1997. There is also Chabad of Tennessee, approximately a 10-minute drive from the rest of the community.

Approximately six years ago, Rabbi Akiva Males assumed the leadership of the Young Israel of Memphis, a vibrant shul that moved into a large and beautiful new building before Rosh Hashanah of this year.

“Memphis has a long history of wonderful Rabbanim and *mechanchim* who served the community over the years,” says Rabbi Males. “There are generations of boys and girls who received a beautiful Torah *chinuch* at Margolin Hebrew Academy. The entire Orthodox community here rallies behind the day school. Each shul has its own flavor and contributes in its own way.

“Memphis is a warm, friendly, welcoming community,” Rabbi Males continued. “As newcomers have moved away from family and friends, community members here end up forming close relationships with each other — becoming each others’ extended family.”

Margolin Hebrew Academy

Chinuch for the children in Memphis is provided by the Margolin Hebrew Academy, originally named Memphis Hebrew Academy. The school has preschool, elementary and high school divisions, including separate divisions for a girl’s high school and boys’ yeshiva high school. The school’s programming and education is greatly enhanced by the daily involvement of its affiliated Kollel

Torah Mitzion — which consists of an Israeli *Rosh Kollel*, Rabbi Yisrael Wende, his wife, Sara Chaya, four Israeli *bachurim* and four Israeli young women with the Bat Ami program.

Rabbi Yonason Gersten is principal of the both the boys’ and the girls’ high school division of the Margolin Hebrew Academy, known as Feinstone Yeshiva of the South. The school has a total of approximately 220 students in all divisions, a significant growth from previous years, due to all of the newcomers to the community.

“In the boys’ high school, we have boys that are very accomplished in their learning, and are admitted to a wide range of yeshivos of their choice in Eretz Yisrael after graduation. Our school’s mission is to serve every interested person with an authentic Torah education. We have an excellent secular education, so that we can accomplish serving every person. We work to address each student on their level.

“We are a yeshivah that focuses on *yesodei hadas*, on the things that unite frum Jews, rather than those that separate us,” Rabbi Gersten continued. “We are fortunate that our Rebbeim, by their very nature, are people who focus on that. We really have Rebbeim and moros from a wide range of backgrounds, but we all work well together because of that emphasis.”

Memphis Community Kollel

In 2016, a new era began in Memphis, when a group of lay leaders felt that the community was ready for even more growth. They visited Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim in Queens, where they met Rabbi Yosef Braha and Rabbi Shmuel Fromowitz, and asked them if they would come to form a *kollel* in Memphis. Rabbi Braha and Rabbi Fromowitz went down to Memphis to check it out and were “blown away by the people there.” As they say, the rest

is history, as the Memphis Community Kollel was born.

“We have been tremendously well-received by the community in general,” says Rabbi Braha. “When we were first planning to move here, some expressed skepticism that we would find people to learn with. However, they were quickly proven wrong, as within a month, our schedules were full of people learning. We were thrilled to be able to bring meaningful, quality programs to the community.”

The *kollel* began with four *yungeleit*, but was able to steadily add more each year. Today, there are seven *yungeleit*, who learn together for a serious morning *seder*, and then spend the rest of the day learning with community members, either as one-on-one *chavrusos*, or in small groups.

The wives of the *kollel* members are very involved as well, as many learn one on one with women and girls in the community, run programs for teenage girls, host guests for Shabbos *seudos* and, in general, are role models for all.

Rabbi Yehoshua Nissan, a member of the *kollel*, shares his perspective on the Memphis community and the role of the *kollel*. “Since the beginning, it has been amazing. People were coming to learn right away, as if they were waiting for someone to come over and learn with them. One person told me that he had never in his life learned one-on-one with someone. He was eager to learn about Torah and Yiddishkeit. Many of these people are fully observant, but never got a chance to connect to Torah in a deeper capacity. We cannot keep up with the number of people who wish to learn together. It is a testimony to the *neshamah* of a Jew, anywhere, anytime, and the power of Torah and *ruchniyus*. The presence of the *kollel* is enriching the community, but at the same time, we deeply believe that we are taking more than we are giving. We are growing along with the community in a real way. It is humbling to see people who have lived a certain lifestyle for a long time and watch them re-engage in Torah. We ask ourselves, ‘Am I that dedicated? Am I willing to grow out of my comfort zone and change?’”

Growth of a Community

In recent years, Memphis has seen tremendous growth, with about 10 new families moving in each year and a current approximate total of 150 *shomer Shabbos* families.

What is bringing people to Memphis? The community is vibrant and sociable; everyone is friendly with each other, despite varied backgrounds. All work together *b’shalom* for the benefit of the broader community.

There is the full infrastructure of a frum community, with shul, *eruv*, kosher food, *mikveh* and *chinuch* for

the children. Furthermore, there are plenty of job opportunities, and the cost of living is relatively low — one can buy a nice three- to four-bedroom house for approximately \$400,000.

We spoke with several community members, both new and veteran, to hear their views of the Memphis community.

Mr. Ari Rashkin shared his perspective. “We love it here! I grew up in Buffalo and my wife is from Atlanta; Memphis today is similar to the Atlanta that she grew up in. Purim was a great example of the community atmosphere. People set up shop in their front yard, with cotton candy, ice cream, etc., and everyone in the community stopped off at each house in costume; it was really great. The non-Jewish neighbors are friendly too; the city has that southern hospitality feeling.

“Furthermore,” Mr. Rashkin continued, “the amount of learning being done at the *kollel* is unbelievable. The *kollel* members are doing whatever they can do to increase Torah learning in the community. The *kollel* was definitely one of the factors in our decision to move to Memphis and I cannot imagine the community without them.”

Mr. Jason Caplan, also a relative newcomer to Memphis, related, “We moved to Memphis in 2016 because I found a good job opportunity here. We visited and saw that the community was up and coming and thought it would be a great place to move. We love the warmth and friendliness of the community. We became active in both Baron Hirsch and Young Israel, and also became very involved in learning with the *kollel*. I have since become a big advocate for the *kollel* because I saw how it improved our lives, much more than we expected.”

Mrs. Esther Katz, who has been living in Memphis for the past 49 years, related, “My husband was born in Memphis, and we raised three children here — two still live here. We are proud to have four generations of the Katz family living here. It is a very heimish community and everyone helps each other out. When my daughter got married, I thought she would surely want to have her wedding on the East Coast, but she wanted to have it in Memphis, because everyone here felt like family. As a former New Yorker, I like the slow pace of life. We don’t have restaurants, but we have each other, and that speaks volumes.

“The *kollel* has really inspired the community,” Mrs. Katz continued. “We are extremely blessed to have this amazing group of Rabbanim involved in the community now. They have really reached the entire community and have had a positive *hashpa’ah* on the people they learn with. They are fabulous role models for our children and grandchildren.”