

# Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

## Building Life-Long Connections

by Chaim Revier

My car winds around the Jerusalem hills, and I am struck by the beauty of my surroundings as I approach a quiet, rustic corner of Ramot. The sun reflects off the white-stoned, red-roofed villas climbing in step-like formation up the mountainside. These picturesque slopes filled with lush vegetation host Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim (AJ), where *bochurim* from the United States, Canada, and England study under the direction of Rosh Yeshivah Rabbi Michael Jablinowitz. I'm sure that the legendary warmth, personal growth, and lifelong relationships nurtured at AJ must develop under unique circumstances which I'll soon be able to observe.

### UNIQUE ATMOSPHERE AND SCHEDULE

Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim is housed in two adjoining villas. Its spacious interior contains the *beis medrash*, dorm, and dining room — all under one roof. The windows of the sizable *beis medrash* open onto a beautiful garden. Inside, the atmosphere is serious, yet permeated with sunshine and the true joy that can be discovered in learning. It's only the first week of the *zman*, but looking around, I already sense the camaraderie and group cohesiveness, as the boys delve into the Gemara together with their rebbeim and *rosh yeshivah*. Together is the key word. Some learn with *chavrusos*, and some, in groups of five or six, are learning with a rebbe.

Rabbi Jablinowitz explains the curriculum to me: "We have two different tracks in the yeshivah. The advanced track is more proficient in learning and has a typical yeshivah schedule of three *sedarim* in Gemara. They work mainly on advancing their skills in analyzing Rishonim and Acharonim. Their morning rebbe is Rabbi Shlomo Ribner, a *talmid chacham* of unique stature. Learning with him links our *talmidim* with the tradition of Chaim Berlin and Netzach Yisrael, where Rabbi Ribner learned.

"In the other track, the boys don't learn Gemara with a *chavrusa* all day long. Many boys who arrive at age seventeen or eighteen,



straight out of high school, aren't able to start off the year by preparing the Gemara on their own with a *chavrusa*. Ateret Yerushalayim's very low teacher-student ratio ensures a great deal of attention towards personal skills development. Rabbi Nosson Levin, one of the founding rebbeim and charismatic *menahel*, has great success in motivating his *talmidim* with his high

energy, warmth, and dedication.

"The morning is devoted to Gemara. The afternoon is divided into subject hours of halachah, Chumash, *machshavah*, and *hashkafah*, which are learned in smaller, more informal groups with a rebbe. By learning *hashkafah*, we give the boys a deeper understanding of the mitzvos, like Shabbos and Yom Tov.

"Our goal with our *talmidim* goes beyond improving in learning. We want to make serious *bnei Torah* who have a continuous connection to *talmud Torah*. We strive to make our boys *baalei middos* and greater *yirei Shamayim* for whom Yiddishkeit will always be the focus of their life."

### SATISFACTION OF SKILLS-BUILDING

I'm interested to hear how the *talmidim* improve their textual skills; that area doesn't have too many shortcuts. Rabbi Gendelman, the halachah rebbe, shares his exciting and interesting technique which improves reading proficiency:

The first step is posing the challenge at an appropriate level. "While teaching *hilchos Shabbos*, I

choose a sefer with basic sentence structure, so the *talmidim* only need to learn a few key words that are repeated throughout the chapter. We master those words together and it's not a struggle at all. Even boys who haven't been used to learning 'inside' get satisfaction from seeing the results of their effort and it makes them want to be more involved.

"We maintain a good flow; I switch off by reading out loud and letting the boys take turns. As the year progresses, the boys read for longer stretches at a time. I really take pride in each step of a *talmid's* progress and I encourage the *talmidim* to recognize their own accomplishments. After every *perek*, we have a *siyum*; we don't wait until the end of the sefer to celebrate."

### DELIVERING DIVREI TORAH - A LIFETIME SKILL

There's nothing like celebrating accomplishments together and enjoying a warm comfortable rebbe-*talmid* bond. Rabbi Gendelman can't linger long as he describes his Thursday afternoon *dvar Torah chabura*, because it's about to start. He's worked with some boys during the week, helping them prepare and structure the five-minute talks which they'll present to their friends. That's one skill that a young man knows he'll put to good use - at the table of his Shabbos hosts, when he attends friends' and family's *simchas*, and eventually when he conducts his own Shabbos table.

### RELATIONSHIPS WITH REBBEIM

During breaks between *sedarim*, there are opportunities to strike up conversations with the *rebbeim*. The *bochurim* know that they can confidently approach the *rosh yeshivah* and the *rebbeim* for advice, and talk with them about everything that's on their minds. The *rosh yeshivah* and the *rebbeim*, however, don't wait. They reach out to the *bochrim* and seek them out to see how they're doing.

"Nobody falls through the cracks; we're very attuned to the boys. If a boy isn't doing well, we don't wait for him to come and tell us. We know something is wrong," says Rabbi Jablinowitz. If a boy doesn't show up at *sefer*, his rebbe will call him, see how he's feeling, and just say, "We missed you in *shiur* today." No one feels invisible, each one is noticed, and the *rebbeim* know exactly how each boy is progressing. The connection continues after hours, as boys enjoy spending Shabbos at their rebbe's homes and know they're always welcome.

Rabbi Jablinowitz sums up: "We're very involved with the boys in all aspects of their growth, their emotional growth, their learning. We listen to them. No topic is too embarrassing to mention; our warmth and respect for our boys create a comfortable atmosphere. We stay connected even after they leave the yeshivah. If a boy



Building a lifelong connection — Rosh Yeshivah Rabbi Jablinowitz presenting the alumnus of the year award at the first annual Ateret Yerushalayim Alumni dinner





moves to another yeshiva, I'll keep in touch and ask how his *shiur* is going and if he's found good *chavrusos*. Even after the boys leave, we never just say goodbye and disconnect from their life."

#### SERIOUS LEARNING, SERIOUS PLAY

There's a wonderful balance of serious learning and serious play. This balance includes Thursday night *mishmar*, where the boys learn until late at night with former *talmidim* while snacking on *cholent*, cake, and soda. Every Monday after *seider*, the yeshiva has gym night; the boys choose between basketball and swimming. Fun and uplifting trips range from paintball to a yeshiva Shabbos in Tzfas. Every Rosh Chodesh, the yeshiva davens at the Kosel together. They also enjoy regular *kumzitzim*.

*Talmidim* feel welcome visiting their rebbeim's homes and getting to know their families, building a rebbe's succah along with him, then cooling down with bowls of American ice cream. This gives a feeling of being part of a family and an active part of the Yom Tov season's exciting hustle and bustle.

#### ONCE A TALMID, FOREVER A TALMID

The friendships formed at Ateret Yerushalayim and the deep bonds between rebbe and *talmid* stay strong through phone calls, regular reunions at Shabbatonim, get-togethers, and recently the yeshiva's first dinner. Parents keep up the connection as well; even long after their sons have graduated from the yeshiva, parents know they're free to keep calling for guidance, advice, and to share their updates



and *nachas* with those who care the most.

Rabbi Jablinowitz and his staff take great pride in their alumni, who are committed to making set times for Torah study in their daily schedules,

whether following a day of work with a night kollel or fitting *shiurim* into their college schedule. Some remain in a full-time learning program, ranking at the top of the yeshivos where they learn today. Wherever they are, Ateret Yerushalayim alumni are leading members of their community, serious daveners in their shuls, attentive listeners at *shiurim*, ever committed to learning Torah and encouraging Torah endeavors.

Ateret Yerushalayim alumni have the drive to bring community projects to completion. Rabbi Jablinowitz treasures the newspaper clippings of his alumni's community accomplishments: founding new shuls, arranging learning events, strengthening Jewish life. The *rosh yeshiva*'s devotion to his current student body doesn't preclude his spending time focusing on his alumni's life questions, as they call in about *shidduchim*, family issues, careers, and life goals. The *talmidim*, in turn, value the ties with their *rosh yeshiva* and rebbeim and reciprocate their genuine and honest caring interest.

Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim is truly about building lifelong connections: with friends, with *rebbeim*, with the *rosh yeshiva*, and with the Torah — connections that always remain strong. ■

